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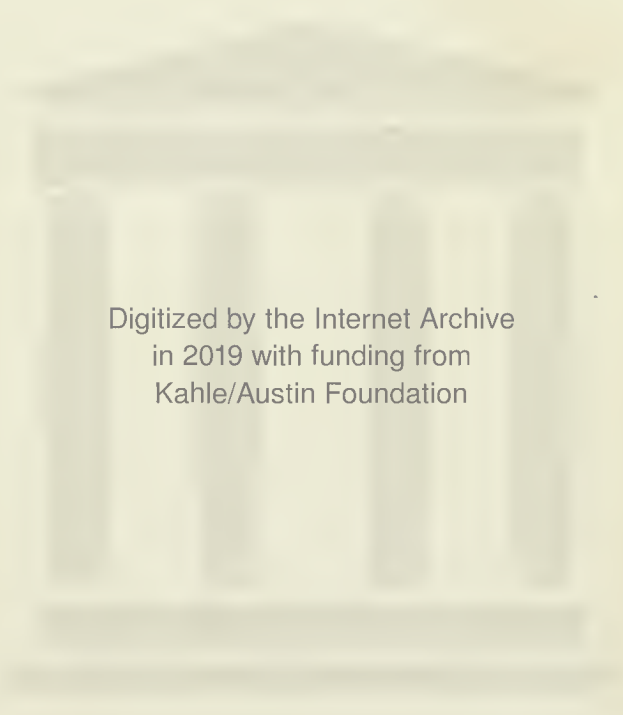
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THE TIGER WHO WALKS ALONE

BY
CONSTANCE LINDSAY SKINNER

Frontispiece by
W. LANGDON KIHN

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1931

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Dedicated to that distinguished South American soldier, General Rafael de Nogales, whose brilliant military exploits in his own land and in Turkey during the World War might well have made him the hero of this book.



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THE TIGER WHO WALKS
ALONE



THE TIGER WHO WALKS ALONE

CHAPTER I

A VOICE OUT OF THE FOG

DICK met Mendez first in London, where they fell into a friendship at first sight. It was an affair of instantaneous liking and confidence on both sides. Nevertheless, even Dick's family, who were used to surprises from him, thought it a peculiar thing that this affection should have arisen between the blond, very American boy of sixteen and the Spanish-American soldier of fortune who would not see forty again.

"Still after all," said his mother, "Dick is only proving himself again a true Wynn. The men of the Wynn family always do the unexpected. You do,

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Richard." She nodded a smiling reproof at her husband. "So does your brother Horace."

This was true enough. The Wynns always preferred "something different." They were lovers of adventure in all senses of the word. Take Dick's father, for instance. He had leaped into the terrible adventure of the World War by way of India, where he had been buying tea, early in 1915. The Armistice had caught him wearing two medals for bravery and distinguished service, with the rank of Colonel. Recently he had forsaken the well-beaten trails of American commerce for an oil adventure in Montalba, in South America. He was in London now on business for the new company, of which he was the head. The oil lands had been discovered by his brother, Prof. Horace Wynn, on one of the latter's scientific expeditions into the jungles and waste places of the American tropics. Horace, being a Wynn, could not stay at Princeton and work in a laboratory or browse in a research library. Every so often he had to hit the trail and tussle with forest, desert or jungle.

Horace was in Cuba now, making his last preparations for another excursion into the tangled mountain regions of Montalba. Dick would join him in Havana; for it had been decided that a year of vigorous, primitive living and scientific education in the Open was just what Dick needed. Dick was growing too fast, said his father. This was always Colonel Wynn's excuse for taking his son "on a hike," as he called it.

They were on a hike now in London. Other pleasant things, besides trips hither and yon, hap-

pened to Dick simply because he was tall and well built, with an upright carriage, and looked older than sixteen. For instance, the meeting with Mendez. It is worth telling how that happened.

When Captain Talbot of the British army, who had known Dick's father on the eastern front, in 1917, came to invite Colonel Wynn to a dinner given in honor of one General de Mendez, he encountered Dick. He thought Dick at least eighteen, from the first glance at him, and invited him to the dinner. Dick accepted promptly. When his mother protested later, he told her calmly:

"Mother, a gentleman doesn't break a formal dinner engagement!"

"He doesn't," she agreed, with twinkling eyes, and sent out his evening clothes to be pressed.

"It was just like Dick to receive Captain Talbot with his most sedate and grown-up manners and get himself invited to an army dinner for men only!" she told her husband. Colonel Wynn laughed appreciatively.

"I'm glad he did. It will be an interesting experience for the boy, something to remember. One doesn't dine with a red-handed ex-Turk every evening."

"A *what!*" she cried. "Isn't the man a Spaniard?"

"He's both. General de Mendez is a South American who has traveled the globe as a soldier of fortune. You remember that phrase of Sir Walter Raleigh's, 'if you hear of a good war, go to it!' Well, that seems to be Mendez's motto. Apparently he was in the Orient when the World War broke out. So he went in with the Turks. Mendez Bey—I tell

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you we knew that name in Mesopotamia! A whale of a fighter. He never let us sleep."

"Will you kindly tell me why civilized British officers are giving a dinner to such a man?—who, I should say, ought to be hanged!" she demanded.

"Ah, that's the old English nature. The Briton loves a chivalrous foe even better than a friend. Mendez Bey was a chivalrous foe. For instance, when his guns brought down one of our aviators, he would wireless the news to us; and, if the airman was alive, suggest that we send another plane with his kit and whatever comforts we could spare. So we'd send a plane, drop the stuff, and come back. Then Talbot and some forty more of these chaps, who have organized the dinner, were taken by the Turks; and all of them would have lost their lives but for Mendez. In Talbot's case, it seems that Mendez drew his revolver on some oily, fanatical, provincial governor, who was about to butcher Talbot, as a Mohammedan sacrifice, and scared him off."

Here Dick, who had been listening with eager attention, broke in.

"But, Dad, the governor and all the soldiers were Turks. They might have killed Mendez, too."

"Talbot expected they would. But, he says, this man Mendez cast a sort of spell over them. They seemed afraid of him. No wonder, says Talbot, who declares that Mendez, at that moment, looked more like a Bengal tiger on the rampage than a human being. It's a fact that Mendez Bey was the most ferocious fighter we ran up against on the eastern front. But now, you see, nearly ten years

later, all we care to remember is, not that he killed many of us, but that he saved some of us."

"I like him," said Dick. "I'm glad I'm going to meet him. He must have some bully yarns to tell about massacres."

"Dick! You are *too* dreadful!" his mother cried.

"Huge luck you and Dad were out when Captain Talbot called," her son went on contentedly, "or I'd never have got to go to the dinner."

"Well, I don't suppose you'll take too much harm from sitting at the table once, for a couple of hours, with the man. It's a relief to me, at least, to know it will only be this once."

If poor Mrs. Wynn could have foreseen, then, where "this once" would lead her son, her vague misgivings would have become a panic. But she had no key for unlocking the future, and so she waved happily at her husband and son, a few evenings later, when they drove off to dinner.

One of its own heavy yellow fogs had descended on London and, as a result, Dick and his father were late in arriving at the club where the dinner was to take place.

"I hope they'll pardon us for this, Dick," Colonel Wynn said as they went upstairs. "Now, with all the fine things the English have done throughout many centuries, why, I ask you, couldn't they have achieved a climate?"

"Maybe they think that blundering about in a fog as thick as pea soup is fun," Dick suggested.

Once inside the dining room, they found the guests assembled. There were about fifty of them, most of them in uniform. Captain Talbot greeted

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Colonel Wynn and Dick warmly and introduced them.

"Which is Mendez?" Dick whispered to his father.

"General de Mendez hasn't arrived yet," Talbot said, having overheard the whisper. "But then," he added, "there's nothing remarkable about that. I've piloted Mendez Bey through several engagements during the last ten days and he has always been late. He has the Latin-American view of time. One hour will serve as well as another!"

"If it were a battle instead of a dinner," said another officer, a Major Herbert, "Mendez Bey would be here an hour ahead of time."

"The fog is probably tying him up, too," Dick suggested. He moved away from the group and went slowly round the room, looking at the old colored prints on the wall. They were hunting scenes and queer stilted pictures of battles, and, on the whole, they did not greatly interest Dick, who was keenly eager for the appearance of Mendez. He became so impatient presently that he slipped away downstairs, not noticing that he had descended by another staircase than the one he had climbed with his father. In trying to find his way to the front of the building through the twisting halls of the ancient structure, he came to a door which he thought must surely divide the back from the front part of the clubhouse. He opened it; and looked out into the thick, damp night.

"Ugh! It's like putting your head into a kettle of soup," he muttered. He was about to shut the door when he heard an angry voice out there in the

dense fog, which had enveloped the club garden. The voice seemed to be wandering about rapidly, but helplessly, and the fury in it increased by seconds. It was raging in a strange language; and presently Dick caught the sound of a Spanish word he knew.

"Hullo there!" he shouted excitedly. "Are you Mendez?"

"Huh?" It was a hoarse, questioning grunt. "Yes," more sharply. "Of course I'm Mendez. Who did you think I was? Santa Claus? How the devil do I get out of this garden? Where is the clubhouse?" Then followed a stream of foreign words which Dick, shaking with laughter now, rightly surmised were none too complimentary epithets hurled at the London climate.

"I'm standing in the club doorway," he informed the angry lost one in the garden. "If I keep on talking and you keep on coming toward my voice, you'll wind up indoors after a while."

"After a while!" Mendez repeated, stormily. "Holy Smoking Moses! This is the worst ever! I have been on deserts, where we had to go like cats so the enemy on all sides would not see us. I have been in jungles, in black nights, with snakes and tigers all around. But, I swear to you solemnly, that never have I felt so much danger as now in this fog. I feel as if all ancient graves had opened and I was caught in the flapping shrouds of a million ghosts. Goodness gracious, yes!"

"Oh, I say!" Dick expostulated, "you give me the shivers."

"There! Now at last you are talking, and I can

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hear where your voice comes from. I thought you had gone dumb."

As Dick had been politely keeping quiet while Mendez was talking, this struck him as unfair.

"Oh, I say, you know, General de Mendez—" he began.

"Never mind General. Say only Mendez. We are friends."

"Well, anyhow, Mendez, how could *I* talk when *you* kept on talking?" There came a chuckle, from quite close now.

"My boy, if you wait till others are silent, you will never be heard in this world. Take a lesson from me. I will be heard, some day. Oh, yes!"

"I'd say you *had* been heard already, Mendez," said Dick. He felt a very natural pride in being asked to call the guest of honor by his surname without a prefix; and then, too, even though he had not the slightest idea yet what the man looked like, he was tremendously attracted to him. In the husky tones, whether angry or chuckling, which reached him through the fog there was a vibrant, magnetic, warm quality that thrilled Dick.

"Oh, say! I wish you'd get here," he cried out impatiently. "I'm dying to know what you look like!"

"Oh, not so much; not so much. Just a little fellow. Legs bowed by the saddle, and a face dark as a coffee bean. Just a little brown *jinete*!"

"That's a horseman," said Dick promptly.

"You heard some Spanish words already, huh? That's good. Wow!"

"What's the matter?" Dick asked excitedly.

"Saffron-eyed cat of the eternal Sphinx! Something bit me!"

"A dog?" Dick bent forward, in his excitement, till he almost overbalanced himself. He could make out the figure of Mendez now, a darker blotch on the fog, stumbling toward him.

"Dog? No! A dog has more sense. He doesn't want to poison himself! A little tree with thorns!"

"A rosebush scratched you, maybe," Dick said, laughing again.

"Oh! When it's a dog, it bites. When it is a little tree with thorns, it scratches. Huh? I learn some more of this funny English language from you. Hullo! Good evening. How are you? Señor Boy, I am very happy to meet you."

Mendez emerged from the fog, leaped with the lithe spring of a cat upon the doorstep, and caught Dick's hand in a steel grip. Dick looked down on him, smiling; literally looked down, for the man with the big husky voice and the hard strong hand was indeed, as he had said, "a little fellow."

"By the beard of the Prophet, London is a chilly graveyard to-night! Take me in where there is light," he pleaded, so pathetically that Dick drew him quickly inside with a sudden odd feeling of protectiveness and sympathy. He was eager to see the man's face, though he knew already that, even if it were positively ugly, he would like it.

It was far from ugly, he saw, as Mendez removed his hat and ran his hand over his hair, which was fine and soft and a glistening black; more like a young black fox's fur than human hair, Dick thought. The skin of hand and face was a smooth

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brown, with that tinge in it which gave the "Red" Indians of the Americas their name. The hands were finely formed; and the face was a long oval with aquiline features, perfectly sculptured, of a proud and somber cast. It was a warrior's face. But just now one might have doubted that description, because of the ivory teeth flashing in a smile, and the kindly look in the eyes. They were large, brilliant, dark eyes, with a peculiar tawny flame in them, which made them seem like two black crystals reflecting some fire playing upon them. In all, it was a handsome face, striking, powerful, magnetic; and, at the present moment, almost boyishly eager and delighted. Mendez, quite plainly, was enjoying this little adventure as much as Dick was.

"Ah! I knew you were a boy the minute you spoke. My, my! But there is something nice in a young voice, especially to the ears of an old fellow like me. And, in this graveyard fog, it is better than the bells of Paradise."

"You don't look old," Dick protested.

Mendez's expression changed suddenly. His face looked as if a heavy black shadow had fallen on it. His jaw seemed to be set in iron lines, now that the smile had vanished; and his eyes had no more light than dead coals.

"It is not years but the things a man has seen—and done—that make him old. I hope you will live to a hundred, Señor Boy, but never be as old as Mendez." His smile flashed back as suddenly as it had passed. "What is your name?" he demanded.

"Dick Wynn. There's some more, but that's all I use."

Mendez chuckled. "Wynn alone is enough. My, my! I wish my name was Wynn. Then I would win everything I want, huh?"

In speaking, he had rapidly removed his cloak; and had suspended it, with his hat and a small handbag, from a rack on the wall, where other hats and coats, probably belonging to the servants, were hanging. Dick's eyes were fastened now, with keen interest, on Mendez's uniform and, particularly, on the beautiful decorations on his breast.

"Eight of them," he counted aloud. "You don't need to be named Wynn. You've won enough."

"All trimmed up like a Christmas tree, huh? You think it looks foolish?" He was plainly embarrassed for the moment. "Captain Talbot requested it. I had to do it."

"No; it isn't foolish!" Dick refuted the notion stoutly. "Do tell me about them. What are they, Mendez?"

Once more that somber shadow fell, which seemed to turn the man's face into an iron cast.

"You want to know what they are? They are the little bits of tinsel men die for! What time is it?" he asked abruptly. "After nine?"

"No. It isn't quite nine yet. Ten minutes to."

"My, that's lucky. I was afraid I would be late."

"Well," Dick said, hesitatingly, "the invitations said *eight* o'clock."

"Oh, yes. Eight, nine; that's all right. Nothing spoils here. English food is solid. It keeps. But I would not like to be late for an affair like this."

If Mendez did not think nine was late for an

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eight o'clock dinner—well, Dick, with a little giggle, gave it up!

"You see," Mendez said, slipping his hand into Dick's arm as they began to mount the stairs, "there is an old man in London, away over on the East Side, who was once a gardener for my father in South America. And he is sick, too, and very poor. I hear of it only this afternoon, round five, six o'clock. So I have to go there to take some money and some little things to make some comfort for him; huh? I know it will take long because of this fog. So I carry my bag with my uniform and Christmas trimmings, thinking I can easily change my clothes in his room. But no! He has only one room, and all his family is there, too! And it is too long to go back to the hotel. That would make me late. So I have to dress in the cab; and to pin on my medals by the light of my electric flash. What I look like I don't know. And I care not so much—only that I shall be what you call 'tidy'; huh? You think I am tidy, Dick Wynn?"

"You look splendid!" Dick exclaimed enthusiastically. He liked the idea of Mendez going to see his father's old servant; and then taking advantage of the darkness of the fog to dress himself, as his cab rocked along over the cobblestones. He laughed suddenly at the picture as he imagined it.

"Even fog is good for something," Mendez said, understanding, and laughing back at him.

"You must have been just what the English said you were, an awfully fierce fighter, to get all those medals from the Turks. And, I say, Mendez Bey,

honest, you look exactly like some sheik or caliph out of the *Arabian Nights*."

Mendez Bey, quick to appreciate Dick's frank hero worship, smiled at the boy affectionately.

"Ah! You like that book?" he said softly. "I, too. When I was a boy, very small, we sat out in the rose gardens—ah, you should see the roses of the Andes! Nothing in life is more beautiful! And there they read to me the *Thousand and One Nights* about Bagdad, about Damascus, and the sweet red roses of Araby. I used to think 'I will go there some day.' And then, so long afterward, the war took me there; to all those old oriental cities and bazaars and mysterious places. But the rose of Araby is not fairer, nor sweeter, than my own red Andean rose, in the gardens of Montalba." His voice died away in a profound sigh.

"Montalba!" Dick exclaimed excitedly. "Why, I'm going to Montalba!" Mendez wheeled sharply.

"What's that you say?" he demanded so harshly that Dick almost jumped.

"Yes. We're going. I am, and Uncle Horace," he stammered.

"There now! Too bad I startled you. I am a barking little fellow, you see. You are going to South America for a vacation trip, eh? So it would be better to go to Brazil, or Argentina, not Montalba."

"But you see," Dick explained, "we have interests there now." He went on to tell about the planned expedition, not observing how gravely and darkly Mendez's black pits of eyes regarded him from a face that, again, resembled an iron mask.

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"Well, well, then. It is all settled, huh? And so you will surely go." He smiled oddly. "You, who like fierce fighters—huh? Maybe you will meet *El Tigre de San Cristóbal*."

"What's that?" Dick wanted to know.

"It is a name; what you call a bad name—no—a nix-name?"

"Nickname," Dick laughingly corrected.

"All right. It is a nickname. Ours are not real tigers, like India, but jaguars. So the name means The Jaguar of San Cristóbal. That is how he is called by some. It is said, his own men call him The Tiger Who Walks Alone."

"Who?" Dick queried, puzzled.

"A chieftain of the Montalban mountains. Many people are afraid of him. That is why they call him by the name of the fiercest beast in all the western world."

"Oh, tell me about him!"

"By and by. I hear voices. This way, huh?"

He darted ahead and threw the door open. Dick followed, to see Mendez grasping one man after another by both hands, his face beaming.

"My goodness gracious!" he heard him say, "when that fog caught me I was afraid I would be late! My, my! But I am glad I got here on time."

CHAPTER II

THE ASSASSIN'S SHOT

FORTUNATELY for Dick, the seat assigned him was directly opposite that of the guest of honor. He could hear every word Mendez said, could watch the vivid and varied play of expressions on the man's mobile face and, better yet, could exchange intimate words and glances with him. He and Mendez were friends for life already; there was no doubt about that. He sat there staring at him with shining eyes and grinning with happiness and amusement. Once he whispered to his father, under cover of the waiter's activities:

"Don't you nearly explode when he says 'my goodness gracious'? Where do you suppose he ever picked up that girly swear word?"

"It does sound funny, coming from him," Colonel Wynn agreed.

"And that 'huh'? Major Herbert jumped the first time he 'huh'-ed at him." Colonel Wynn laughed as he whispered back.

"Yes. Sounds like something between the grunt of a hungry lion and the first rumble in the pit of a volcano."

"Oh, I say! that's good!" said Dick, appreciatively. "It sure is an awful fierce grunt."

"Do you notice, too, that sometimes his English

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is correct, except for the strong accent, with even a literary touch, as if he had learned it from good books? Then, perhaps because he becomes self-conscious——”

“I know,” Dick interrupted, nodding. “It goes to pieces like a smashed plate. He mixes all the tenses of the verbs; just the way I do when I try to talk Spanish!”

Talbot’s voice, raised in question, caught their attention.

“Come now, Mendez Bey, give an account of yourself. What were you, a man from the free western world, doing in that army of bloody scavengers?”

“Huh? You want to know how a leopard from Spanish America changed his spots Turkish fashion? All right. That is a funny story, about a crazy man: me! When the war broke out, I was in one of the little West Indian isles. I thought, ‘I will go and fight for Belgium.’ To get out of there across the seas, with all the enemy cruisers around, was not so easy. Never mind. I arrived. In Dunkirk I told them why I had come. They put me in jail as a spy, with another man they caught that day, who was a German in an English uniform. Him, they shot. Me, they let go. Lucky for me I wore a tweed suit, huh? So I went to France. Almost the same story. But there an Italian officer said, ‘Go to Montenegro. They need soldiers. If you can get there alive, which is doubtful, they will be glad to see you.’ All right. I start.”

“Look here, Mendez,” Major Herbert broke in, “no wonder they thought you crazy, if you tried to

get from France to Montenegro with the whole of Europe in flames across your path! Even that symbol of chivalry, Don Quixote himself, would have stopped short of that."

"Quixote was only Spanish. I am Spanish-American. We are crazier! Again, it is not so easy to get to the place I want to go. But again I arrive. And what happens immediately? I take a walk up a big hill and I step into a trench full of men. My goodness gracious! I am in bad this time for sure! Because this is the front line and I am strolling along over the border into Austria! Holy Smoking Moses! I come down that hill with two pistols at each side of my head, and carbines at my back, to the fortress. But, there, I am so happy as to convince the commandant of my innocent intentions. Still, he is afraid to let me into the army. Because, you see, while I want so much to fight for the Allies, I will not renounce my citizenship in my own country. Never in life, not for any cause in the world, will I swear allegiance to another flag than the flag of Montalba. This kind officer says to me, 'Go to Serbia.' All right. I start."

"You arrived," Dick prompted. Mendez flashed a smile at him.

"Hullo! You are still there, huh? Yes. I arrived. My, my! I had some excitements getting there; but I don't tell them, the story gets too long. In Serbia it was just the same silly business. As my last chance, I went to Bulgaria; to see the Russian minister there. But no. None of these people could understand this crazy man, who had come all the way from the West Indies to fight for them; and

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then traversed Europe in the midst of war, and spent his last dollar in getting to Sofia, and who yet would not forswear his own flag and country. To that Russian I said, 'My goodness gracious, you were not so particular at Port Arthur, where I commanded some of your troops and got my arm broken by a Japanese bullet.' I was not very polite to that Russian," he admitted with a deprecating gesture, "but I was really annoyed at last, you see, by all this silly business."

"And the Turks caught you on the rebound, eh?" Talbot asked.

"Oh, my, yes." Mendez shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette. "I was in desperation. Nothing to do, and nowhere to go. Not a dollar left. To get home was impossible. Then the Turks came to me and offered me a place with them. They said, 'We do not ask you to renounce your citizenship, nor to take any oath at all. It is enough for us if Colonel de Mendez will give us his word of honor to remain loyal to us while he wears the sultan's uniform.' To so chivalrous an appeal as that, gentlemen, if it had come from Satan himself, I would have answered, 'Yes'! So I went."

"I understand that," said Colonel Wynn.

"I think we all do," said Herbert.

"Yes," Talbot agreed. "And it was shrewd of the Turks! They knew, evidently, what had happened to you, and they very cleverly sized you up as a man who couldn't resist the chivalrous appeal."

Mendez laughed.

"Oh my, yes! They kept me four years by those nice little tricks. The Turks are clever. You see,

after I saw those Armenian massacres, I wanted to get out. The army was opposed to the massacres and did not take part in them; all that wicked business was done by the civil authorities under the orders of Talaat, the grand vizier. But we were on the spot, to hold back the Russians out of Armenia. So I saw everything. Then the Turks decided I must be killed; because I had seen things no Christian should see and, later, tell to the world. Well, that was not such a pleasant situation for me, huh? Never mind. All the attempts they made failed. But, even when I knew what plots they had tried on me, they would say, 'Truly, only a miracle of Allah can save us from defeat. Will you leave us in our hour of need?' To go then would make me look like a coward, huh? And an ingrate, too. Because, never mind if they meant to kill me before I could get out of their domains, they had taken me in the hour of my despair—and solely on my word of honor. Oh my, yes! The Turk is clever. Maybe I am clever, too?" he laughed, "because here I am, alive still. Well, it was a great game while it lasted!"

"What are you going to do now? Go in with the pacifists?" asked Herbert. There was a general laugh at this, in which Mendez joined. Then he answered with one of his sudden changes from merriment to deep seriousness.

"I wish I could share the pleasant faith of those people. But I have seen too much of the jungle beast in the hearts of men. Cruelty, ambition, greed for power and wealth—these are still in the world; they are strong, and they do not mind wading in

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blood to their goal. Maybe my vision is limited, or very crooked; but I cannot see the house of Liberty as a secure place without the bared sword before the door."

The talk drifted to other subjects. For a time Herbert and Mendez were deep in a discussion of the antiquities and ruins of the East; for which, it appeared, both of them had a passion. But presently Dick found an opportunity to ask Mendez to tell him some more about the Jaguar of San Cristóbal.

"I like that name—The Tiger Who Walks Alone," he said.

"Ah! you want some more of bad man's adventures, huh?"

"Yes." Dick admitted he wanted to hear all the adventure stories which Mendez could cram into that evening. "Then, too, you know, I am going into his country. So, of course, I want to hear about him."

"Well, then I will tell you only what I have heard. It is said that a feud arose between this man and someone very important in the government. So this man left the cities and civilized life, and plunged into the fastnesses of the mountains. There he collected several hundred men, peons, poor people, bandits, all such; and he made them into his army. In the capital, Amarilla, some will tell you of things he did worse than I saw in Armenia—anyway, as bad. And others do not dare to pronounce his name. The government can never catch him, though they try hard. Because only he and his savage Indian friends know the jungle; and he can disappear where none can follow. The superstitious ignorant people

believe that he escapes by turning into a jaguar. They tell this story of him. Once, they say, a man received *El Tigre* under his roof as a friend; but he had taken money to betray him. In the night he led two soldiers to the door of *El Tigre's* room; but he himself would not go in, because he was afraid. Instead, he watched in the court below. Then—this is what he says—he saw a big jaguar leap out through the window. In the moonlight, so he says, he could see the spots on his hide clearly, but the face was *El Tigre's*, very terrible with fury. The jaguar bounded across the open space and on to the back of *El Tigre's* horse, and the horse tore away into the night, like mad, with the jaguar on his back. When the man went in, he found one soldier dying and the other dead; but with scratches on them, as if from claws."

Mendez flashed his friendly disarming smile again and shrugged his shoulders.

"Foolish things, huh? But many people believe them. Soon afterward the traitor himself died, in the jaws of a crocodile. Now they say it is bad luck to act against the jaguar."

"A crocodile!" Dick exclaimed. "I didn't know there were crocodiles in Montalba."

"In Montalba there is everything! The capital, Amarilla, is the loveliest city in South America, and one of the most modern; a little Paris, with an entrancing beauty of situation. Less than two hours' journey from Amarilla by airplane, if you could travel so, would land you in a jungle thronged with strange beasts and reptiles, which seem to belong only to prehistoric times. There is the ancestor of

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the horse, the tapir. There are monkeys of all kinds, colors, and sizes. There are jaguars, pumas, and ocelots, all savage, ferocious. In the waters are the dangerous electric eels, the cannibal fish, the sting ray, and eleven varieties of crocodiles, most of them savage. And, along the banks, is the huge anaconda which sometimes grows thirty feet long, and is as vicious as it is sly and powerful. There are, also tribes of utterly savage Indians. No white man dares to go into their country. They still use prehistoric weapons and they brew strange and deadly poisons. Over all, in the sky, hang the vultures waiting for the sure feast. And all these antique creatures of death inhabit a scene of a natural beauty so magical that he, whose eye beholds it, scarcely dares to think it real. In the amazing beauty of those unconquerable heights and those impenetrable jungles, wreathed with vines bearing flaming blossoms, and with radiant orchids, there is more than a tinge of cruelty—as if, there, Nature's smile were caused by the sight of poor tiny white men running about like ants over their rubber and coffee plantations, or in their little sporadic revolutions, and seeking vainly to master her in the last stronghold of her vastness and her savage primordial power."

"Is there an admixture of Indian with the Spanish blood—I mean among the aristocracy? Or is that an offensive question?" asked Talbot.

Mendez laughed. His head lifted and his eyes glowed with pride.

"By no means!" He held up his hands. "See there! Or glance at my head and shoulders from

the back. If you saw me so, for the first time, you would say, 'There is an Indian!' I am proud of this Indian blood. It is the blood of those who have never, to this day, submitted to tyranny; and who do not know cowardice! We speak Spanish; but we Montalbans are not Spaniards. Oh my, no! We are a blend, a new people. In our veins is the blue blood of the warlike Arab-Spaniards of the Conquistador period, and the savage blood of the fiercest Indians in the New World. We are the creatures of our environment. We were shaped by a rich land of magnificent, almost dreamlike, beauty, and of treacherous and terrible death. And, my friends," he smiled his eager, infectious, boyish smile, "I will not deceive you, I admit that we are a *fierce* people!"

"I'll bet *you* are, Mendez," Dick said. "You could get that Jaguar Man if you went after him."

"My goodness gracious! You give me a bad character already? No, no. I am civilized. You see I was brought up in Europe. I am going back now, to Paris, to Berlin, to do some studies in the museums. Why should I fight a Jaguar Man?" He laughed.

In the coat room later, Colonel Wynn said to his son:

"Lucky for your trip, Dick, that your mother didn't meet Mendez and hear his description of Montalba, with its sweet and gentle inhabitants and its harmless animal life!"

Dick grinned.

"She'd be scared! It's made me just wild to go. I'm going to study Spanish a lot harder, so that I can ask people over there about the Tiger Who

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Walks Alone. And about Mendez, too. What do you think of him, Dad?"

"I think he's every inch a man. I like him. But I think, too, that under his veneer of European culture, he is a true Montalban, as fierce as the country that gave him birth. And I don't believe, for one minute, that that dynamo of savage energy is going to spend any years of its life ruminating in a European museum! I feel that Mendez has *something* up his sleeve. But I'll eat my hat if that something is a museum!"

Mendez came down the stairs, two steps at a time, with hardly a sound, like a cat. A servant brought him the cloak and handbag which he had left, earlier, in the back hall.

"You lunch with me to-morrow," he said to Dick, "if your father is willing? Good. I come for you round twelve, one, two o'clock."

As the attendant opened the door they saw that the fog had thinned. Mendez stepped out first, peering sharply ahead.

"Go back!" he commanded harshly and sprang, his lithe small body hurtling into the air like a panther's. At the same moment a bullet struck the wall. The fog was still too dense for Dick and his father to see anything; but, for the second time that night, Dick heard a stream of Spanish in Mendez's voice coming through the mist that covered the garden. Then he heard another voice, smothered, as if the owner of it were choking between strong hands, and the words:

"*El Tigre—*"

The two Wynns rushed toward the sound. When

they reached Mendez he was alone, but they heard running footsteps to one side. Some one was making all haste away from there.

"It is nothing. Don't be alarmed," Mendez said, hoarsely. He stooped to pick up his bag. "A stupid assassin runs away half choked. That is all." Then, in deep disgust he added, "It is the shame of my country that there are Montalbans who will do this dirty business."

"I don't want to intrude with advice, Mendez," said Colonel Wynn, "but, if your life is in danger, oughtn't you to ask protection from the police?"

"No. They could do nothing. It is not a small matter exactly. A man in my country does not like me. And he has agents, who try to prevent me from ever returning. But I beg you not to speak of this to any one."

"All right. I give you my word."

"The skunk dropped his gun," said Dick, who had felt it under his toe and picked it up. "You'd better take it, Mendez; unless you've got your own."

"No, no," hastily. "You take it, please, Colonel Wynn. I never carry a gun. I would kill some one, maybe. You see, I get mad too quick. Oh, no! I know better than to trust Mendez with a gun!" He said good night abruptly, and walked rapidly away through the fog.

"Dad, did you hear the man say '*El Tigre*'?" Dick asked in an excited whisper, as they settled into their cab. "That's the Jaguar of San Cristóbal! Do you know what I think? I'm sure, now, that the government man the Jaguar quarreled with was Mendez. And, I'll bet you anything, Mendez

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is going back to Montalba to fight it out with him. I'll ask him to-morrow. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I should run into him in Montalba?"

But Dick didn't ask Mendez next day. In the morning a message came to the effect that Mendez had been called out of town on business over the week-end. A telephone inquiry to the hotel, some days later, resulted in the information that General de Mendez had departed suddenly during the previous week, leaving no forwarding address.

CHAPTER III

THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEFENDER

THE first thing that Dick did in Montalba was to get himself arrested.

The three men of the Wynn family, Dick, his father, and Uncle Horace, arrived in Amarilla together. Dick and Uncle Horace were to remain there only two days; Colonel Wynn, for several months. Colonel Wynn had to confer with his business associates, two New Yorkers named Blake and Andrews, see government officials, and arrange the oil concession: and the last two important details would take a lot of hard pushing and harder patience on the part of an American in the land where the native response to any hint for action is "*Mañana*," meaning "to-morrow." Professor Wynn had decided to wait over a day because he had heard that, in the university library, there was a diary written in 1660 by a Spaniard, who claimed to have penetrated the most perilous and inaccessible parts of the country, and even to have built a fort in the "territory of the white Indians." One of the scientific objects of Horace's expedition was to discover whether the persistent rumor of "white" Indians in the mountain jungles of Montalba were fact or myth. Therefore, he was off, at an early hour, for the library, to browse for the rest of the day.

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Colonel Wynn went about his own most important business, which was to get a certain government official at least started on the consideration of terms. And Dick was left alone.

During the first hour nothing amiss happened to him. He strolled about the streets and across the beautiful central Plaza, observing the people he passed and feeling proud of himself because he understood some of the words he overheard. To a boy who had divided most of his years between New York and Detroit, and who had also traveled with his father to London, Paris, and Havana, the capital of Montalba did not seem strikingly different from other cities. The vegetation was tropical, and a few of the women wore mantillas instead of hats, and the workmen were not dressed like those who filed out of the Detroit automobile shops. For the rest, it appeared to him a modern city like any other; except, perhaps, that the houses had an unfriendly look with their barred windows and their bare, thick walls rising from the street, without a bit of garden in front.

"Of course, I know they have patios inside, with flowers; and fountains, too, some of them," he muttered to himself. "But that doesn't do a fellow who's strolling along the street, any good."

His appetite presently told him that if lunch wasn't ready it ought to be; so he returned to the hotel. Colonel Wynn was lunching elsewhere with the very potent official; and Horace would not remember food as long as the fascinations of that old manuscript held him. Dick sat down alone, wondering how many of the new Spanish dishes on

the menu he could eat; and, also, what he would do to kill time afterward. He was not alone long. A soft ingratiating voice at his elbow requested, with many apologies, to know whether it would be displeasing to the young *Señor Americano* if the owner of the voice sat at his table.

"Not at all, sir. Glad to have you," Dick answered with the quick, friendly courtesy that was typical of him, as it is of American boys in general. The stranger, uttering profuse thanks, sat down. Dick looked at him in frank interest. He was tall and slim, and languid in his movements. His skin was a dark olive, his eyes and hair and short mustache were black. The eyes were deep set, and seemed to take only fleeting glances at the world around, receding instantly under the low-hanging lids. One eyelid drooped more than the other. Dick's attention was caught by the man's hand reaching for the menu card. It was a very long thin hand with fingers that broadened curiously at the short-nailed tips. He introduced himself presently as *Señor Lopez*.

"My name's Dick Wynn," Dick countered affably, glad he had some one to talk to. Innocently enough, he found it very easy to talk to *Señor Lopez*. Indeed, *Señor Lopez* asked just the right questions to set him off. And he was so interested in learning that Colonel Wynn was about to develop a part of Montalba's natural wealth; and that Uncle Horace was a man of science; and that Dick was going into the jungle lands about the headwaters of Montalba's great river. How could Dick be supposed to know that the source of all the pleasant stranger's interest was a cablegram from London, telling *Señor Lopez*

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that the two Wynns, father and son, had dined at a certain club on a certain evening with Mendez, and that they were bound for Amarilla?

"And am I, for instance, the first Montalban you have met, señorito?" Lopez inquired presently with a smile.

"Oh no! I've met Mendez—General de Mendez! Do you know him?" Dick asked enthusiastically.

"Ah, no; I have not the honor," Señor Lopez deplored. "But I have, of course, heard of him. All Montalba is very proud of him. We wish only that he would come back and live among us."

"He'd sure make things hum round here," said Dick. "Dad says there's more force bottled up in Mendez than in any other two men he ever saw."

"Ah-h! you think so?" Lopez drawled softly. For half a second his dull gaze passed over Dick's open, eager face, then withdrew behind his low-hanging lids. "And why do you think so? Since you have known this famous man, my compatriot, I beg you to tell me all you can about him. For, indeed, he interests me greatly."

So Dick obligingly did. He told Señor Lopez all he could remember about the dinner; and also about the episode of the would-be assassin.

"And, you know, señor, Mendez said a funny thing about that."

"Ah? What was the funny thing?" Señor Lopez wanted to know.

"He said, 'Let him run off to tell them once again, that it is impossible to assassinate an intelligent man who does not intend to be assassinated!' And when

you heard him say it, you just knew, somehow, that it was true!"

"I wonder?" said Señor Lopez softly. "But, tell me, did our famous Montalban not speak of returning here? And perhaps, also, he gave some explanation of this attempt on his life? The *Señorito Americano* will understand how natural is my deep interest in this subject as a compatriot of his friend."

"Well, he said the fellow who tried to shoot him was a Montalban and an agent of some influential man over here. And we heard him talking Spanish to the beast while he was choking him. So that's straight enough. Do you know who Mendez's enemy is, señor?"

"I?" Señor Lopez was startled out of his smooth composure, for an instant, by the American boy's frank question, which was so different from his own indirect and snakelike methods of getting information. His lids lifted and he almost looked Dick in the eyes for once. Then his dull gaze slanted away and was hidden again. "Ah, no. It seems incredible. Some small personal matter, no doubt. A few of our people are vengeful when offended. It is the Indian blood."

Dick disagreed with that, and said so. He went on to state his theory about the Jaguar of San Cristóbal. As he coolly pronounced that name, a little tremor, like a chill, went over the unattractive features of the affable Señor Lopez. He did not speak for a moment or two, possibly because he feared his voice would be unsteady.

"I fear our noble Montalban was amusing himself

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by telling you such a tale, señorito," he said at last. "For, I assure you, in all my life I have never heard of this—this strange—animal."

"You haven't?" Dick was frankly amazed. He stared hard at the gentleman opposite him, but it did not occur to Dick to doubt his word. "Well, he's real. Mendez didn't make him up. Mendez wouldn't, you know. He's too honest. In fact, he said I'd probably meet the Jaguar over here. I suppose he meant up in that jungle country we're going to."

Señor Lopez showed his somewhat yellowed teeth in what was intended for a smile.

"He may have spoken of some local legend. We in Amarilla have not heard of it." He rose. "It has been for me a most charming and instructive hour, señorito. May we meet again soon!" He bowed himself off graciously.

Once outside the hotel, he hailed an up-to-date taxi and drove for several miles through the streets of the modern city to the outskirts of a large grim stone building, which looked like a medieval fortress. He alighted, told the cabman to wait, and went toward the iron gate in the heavy wall. He passed a word to some one inside, and the gate opened enough to let him squirm through into a bare yard, where there were several soldiers leaning or squatting in languid attitudes. He was escorted by one of them to a small side door, which creaked as if it, too, resented being disturbed at the sleepy hour of the day, but let him pass into a dark and gloomy hall, like a tunnel.

"Tell the Illustrious Defender that I am here

with important information for him," he said to the soldier who had admitted him.

While he awaited for permission to enter the august presence of the President of the Republic of Montalba, he leaned against the wall and rolled and lighted a cigarette. In the gloom his thin-bodied, spindly-legged figure, in its dull cloudy gray suit of clothes, looked like a huge daddy-long-legs spider clinging to the shadowed stone. In response to a summons, presently, he went forward through the tunnel and up a narrow stone stairway into a little room. Here he submitted, with utter indifference, to a minute search of his pockets, his clothing, his shoes, and even his nostrils and ears. The subtle Señor Lopez was well aware that a very small pin, rendered deadly by *curare*, may be easily secreted in a man's coat; and that a tiny globule containing powerful poison may be hidden in the nostril or the ear.

"With Señor Lopez this is only a matter of form. The señor understands. The Illustrious Defender has the utmost confidence in his faithful friend, Señor Lopez," the officer, who was overseeing the search, said mechanically, with a yawn.

"Undoubtedly," Señor Lopez replied, without batting an eyelash. "Give me back my pocket comb."

"The señor understands—" the officer was all apologies for not surrendering the requested toilet article.

"I wish merely to smooth my own hair," Señor Lopez informed him, but without a trace of impatience. In that case, it seemed, he might have it.

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Lopez restored his ruffled coiffure to its former sleekness and handed back the comb. One can never tell about a pocket comb. Suppose it were specially made, with one tooth hollow and filled with poison? No pocket comb could pass the anteroom.

"And now, señor, it is your privilege to enter the presence of the Illustrious Defender." The officer yawned again; and then escorted him into the great man's room.

El Presidente sat in a large throne chair, listening to the radio. Behind him, in a filial attitude, with one arm on his chair, stood his daughter, Juana, a middle-aged spinster who prepared with her own hands every meal that was set before her father. It was Juana's duty to make sure that nothing deadly had been sprayed upon the lettuce, or the fruit; and that the eggs came from a barnyard where no cock had ever crowed "Down with the tyrant! Long live the Revolution!" The apartment was gorgeously furnished in the best European style. There were tables with ivory inlay, rich tapestries, bookcases that were well filled if seldom opened, priceless antiques and oriental rugs. Round her skinny brown neck, Juana wore a string of large emerald beads that would have ransomed a prince.

El Presidente was a rather stocky old man with a heavy face of a decidedly unpleasant type. The mouth was grossly thick, with an expression of brutish cruelty. The eyes were like cold bits of stone. He looked what he was: an Indian small farmer from the hills; who had held power for twenty years, in defiance of the constitution, which

limited the presidential term to four years and forbade any president to succeed himself; and held it, moreover, by methods of terrorization, inhuman cruelty, and sinister craft, which belonged rather to the days and régime of the Aztecs or to the Dark Ages in Europe, than to any civilized land in the twentieth century. Withal, he had the respect of foreign powers and investors, who were naturally not permitted to look behind the scenes. He saw to it that the nation paid money promptly where it owed it; he made things easy for foreign capital; he built roads, laid city car tracks and put up telegraph lines; he had set all Amarilla a-ringing with telephones; he had erected wireless stations. Like a child avid for new toys, he imported all the latest inventions. He had recently bought two airplanes. And since possessing them, it had been his favorite diversion to order the fliers aloft to do perilous stunts over the field below his window. The danger to the aviators' lives did not concern him, except as an added pleasure: but he had been persuaded at last that, if the machines crashed, they could not be repaired in Montalba, and it would be a long time before he could get others. So, much to his chagrin, he had been forced to discontinue his favorite sport.

As he turned now, the light glinted upon a veritable breastplate of medals, orders, decorations, and whatnots, most of them instituted and bestowed by himself upon himself, in the name of the grateful citizens of the republic, who didn't know anything about it until they read the notices he sent to the papers. He gestured Lopez to a seat; but Lopez

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knew better than to take it. He stood beside the chair and waited, while the Illustrious Defender listened in.

It was not jazz that was intriguing his Excellency: far from it! Many miles away, at a university named Harvard, a Mexican, who was prominent in the reconstruction work of the new government of his country, was giving an address. He was telling an audience of several thousand students and guests how, under a series of dictatorships, the peons and farmers in Mexico had been robbed of their farms and driven to the hills and roads to become highway-men in order to exist at all; and how the new government was settling these poor folk back on the land and, thereby, putting an end to banditry. And he was saying not a little about the idealism of the new politics, which held that the soul of a man was of more value to his country than an acre of soil. All this was grimly interesting to his Excellency of Montalba. He congratulated himself on his shrewdness in having learned the language of North America, in which so many perilous ideas were expressed and heard by large numbers of people! He thought how dangerous it would be if that lecturer's creed, fostered as it was by Latin-Americans in a place so near as Mexico, should spread southward, to Montalba, for instance! If two million Montalbans should begin to think their souls valuable, and a dictator an evil thing to be done away with? The lecture ended. *El Presidente's* glance went to the window and out to where his airplanes were; to the other side of the river, where his yacht was moored near the landing field

recently prepared for the planes, and beyond, to the sea harbor where his warship waited, always in readiness, to take him abroad from the yacht and speed him and his millions of money safely overseas to Paris or Monaco. He had made as sure as a man could, that, if a formidable commander arose to lead a revolution, the relatives of the hundreds of victims who had been tortured to death by his orders would not get their hands on him!

"*Querido amigo*," he said affably, "it is agreeable to see you again. I trust you were not detained out there by the good souls who look so well after me?"

"They searched even into my heart, *Excelentissimo*, and found there only fidelity."

"M'm, m'm," *El Presidente* muttered; "it is a foolish custom, but I cannot induce them to abandon it."

Lopez, who knew very well whose orders had subjected him to the indignity of search, and, furthermore, that the sleepy sentinel would much have preferred taking a siesta to tying and untying his bootlaces, bowed and said suavely:

"It is by caution alone that a great man's life is prolonged. And, besides, the Illustrious Defender is the sole guardian of the people's liberties."

Lopez had made that speech so often, under similar circumstances, during the past dozen years, that he could have repeated it perfectly in his sleep!

"True. Perhaps, for their sakes, I will continue the precaution. Now, what is your information?"

With surprising directness, for him, Lopez got to the point. *El Presidente* listened silently to all

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that Dick had said at luncheon. His cold eyes glittered briefly at the mention of Mendez.

"And, so, you think these Wynns know all about Mendez's plans and are here, in reality, as his agents?" he mused aloud. "That is very likely. It will be easy enough to watch the boy's father, because he remains here in Amarilla. But the other two! Why do they go into the jungle?"

"I believe they are taking a message to—" he paused.

"Well, well! Go on!"

"Your pardon, Excellency, for pronouncing that name—"

"Whose name?" hoarsely.

"His Excellency has guessed it."

"Did the boy speak of *him*?" *El Presidente's* face was pale, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Yes. But he spoke deliberately so as to deceive me, saying that he believed Mendez to be the enemy of—. But I saw through that. I said we had never heard of him in Amarilla. He stared at me, the stupid one; and had no answer. These North Americans are all stupid. They should not try to play the game of wits with us."

"This man who kills by the scratch of a jaguar's claws," *El Presidente* whispered. "It is horribly mysterious. And the spots on his skin. They have been seen, Lopez; by men who dare not lie to me. Such strange diabolical creatures appear sometimes in the world. I have heard of them. One has no power against them. Perhaps even airplanes are no use, though they have never been tried before."

But I have bought these planes because I thought that *he*, being a miraculous beast, might become frightened if he saw an airplane, which must surely appear to him to be a huge miraculous bird. Do you not think so, Lopez?"

Lopez smothered an oath as a little shiver ran over him.

"*Excelentissimo*, I hope you are right. But do not ask me to know what is in the mind of a jaguar that is half a man!"

"I think there may be some truth in this tale that Mendez knew *him* some years ago, before he became this thing in a tiger's skin. Both are from San Cristóbal. So, you see, it is possible. And shall I tell you what I think, Lopez? I believe that Mendez, who has been among barbaric deserts and queer peoples in the Orient, has most probably met with these man-beasts like *El Tigre*—" he glanced swiftly about, as if to hear the dreaded name, even from his own mouth, made him fear a gash of claws from the shadows behind him: but he saw only Juana silently muttering prayers with stiff pale lips. "Yes, Lopez. He has met, perhaps, a man-lion or a man-camel—there is a beast there called a camel, Lopez—"

"So I have heard, *Excelentissimo*."

"And he has learned how to become friends with such creatures. He uses some charms, certain phrases said in a particular manner, no doubt. And so he, alone, in Montalba does not fear *El Tigre*." He glanced about again nervously. "What is important is, that they shall not meet to do mischief to—to the people's liberties. *Caramba!* Lopez,

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do you know what would happen if *he* rode into Amarilla in his jaguar's skin, with an army? No! With ten men, five, alone! Every one of my fifteen thousand soldiers would throw away his gun and flee; and the city, the whole country, would be his!"

At that moment there came a loud noise from the anteroom, and the door was thrown open. His Excellency, with distended eyes and his face a greenish pallor, shrank crouchingly back in his chair. His right hand whipped out a long blade from inside his shirt. He had no doubt that, hearing his name pronounced, the mysterious and terrible Man-Jaguar had miraculously appeared, and that he himself was about to die by its claws. But, terror-struck as he was, the old instinct of the Indian warrior awoke in him, to make him prepare to sell his life as dearly as possible; even though it was not a man, but an abnormal fiend from the inferno, that had come to take it.

Lopez flung himself down behind his chair. His gray face peered from side to side of the narrow back. He felt helplessly, frantically, in his pockets for a weapon. Poor Lopez: he had not even a pocket comb! Only Juana did not stir. She stood with shaking knees, hanging to the chair, looking toward the door, her lips moving silently.

And, after all, it was only Dick Wynn who entered, needless to say, under guard!

Immediately after lunch, Dick had gone for another walk, in a new direction. He had left the road and scrambled about the hills, examining flowers and shrubs, and following brilliant birds,

which he had never seen before. He had spied the huge stone building, wondered whether it was a barracks or a jail or a museum, and come down to take a look at it. He had arrived at the back, found a door open, and sauntered in. He did not suppose that he was intruding into any one's home; for nothing about that forbidding castle indicated that it was a private dwelling. He thought that he would go on and explore the place until he met some one whom he could question: and, then, if this person told him to "get out," he would apologize and depart. Meanwhile, until that happened, he saw no reason for not going ahead. That was Dick's way.

Now, in theory, there was never a moment when *El Presidente's* watchdogs were not on guard. But that theory came into conflict every day with another one, which was much older and which had centuries of practice to back it up: namely, that in the tropics every one must take a siesta after lunch. That sleep of from one to two hours, in the hottest part of the day, is believed to give health and long life to the inhabitants. And only very serious matters are allowed to interfere with it. Señor Lopez, for instance, was feeling wretched because he had not dared delay delivering his news until he had slept. The Illustrious Defender had two grudges against that idealistic Mexican who had been Harvard's guest of honor at luncheon; and one was because he had chosen to deliver his lecture at two o'clock, when all sensible people went to sleep! The soldiers below had been not a little annoyed with Señor Lopez for arriving at an hour when even sentinels

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ordinarily took their forty winks. Assassins were only men, they would have argued, and therefore indulged in midday repose; and, as for revolutions, those soldiers knew, none better, that no revolution would begin at two P.M. ! They knew why !

Dick had wandered in at the time of the siesta. And he had reached the second floor by the back-stairs without disturbing any one, until he walked into the anteroom. By opening the door, of course, he waked the officer and his two men; and, naturally, there was a terrible fuss. In dodging away from them, Dick plunged into the chamber of *El Presidente* himself, to be grabbed by the soldiers who pelted in after him. Seeing an old man covered with medals and grasping a knife, and his friend of the lunch hour hiding behind a chair, he called to Lopez :

"I say! What's up?" Lopez rose unsteadily and came forward.

"It is the young *Señor Americano*," he told *El Presidente*.

"Bring him here."

Dick was not easily frightened at any time. A new and thrilling situation did not alarm him, because it always interested him so much. This one was decidedly interesting. He was impatient to know what it meant.

"Who's the old man with the knife? Was he after you? I guess it's lucky for you I dropped in," he said cheerfully. "What place is this anyway, señor? A jail or a madhouse? Is the old man crazy?"

"It is the palace of his Excellency the president

of Montalba; and he who sits there is the Illustrious Defender himself."

"Oh, I say! Gee whiz!" Dick blurted out after having, happily, checked a whistle of astonishment. "Is that so? I say, señor, you apologize to him for me. I don't know enough Spanish." He was crimson with embarrassment. This was the worst break he had ever made in all his life!

"It is unnecessary for you to know Spanish. I speak your tongue," said *El Presidente* with a very marked accent. "I required a professor from the University to teach me English for an hour each day for three years. There are more curious things said in that language than in any other in the world; and it was necessary that I should be able to understand them. You hear that my accent is perfect."

"Ye-yes, sir," Dick stammered.

"I am always told so." *El Presidente* nodded with satisfaction. He motioned the soldiers to withdraw. "Señor Lopez has been telling me interesting news of you and your family. Now let me hear first how you entered my house. And afterward I wish to learn much more about my noble compatriot, General de Mendez. And, it seems too, there is some odd legend about—about—a jaguar?"

"Gee! I'm awfully glad you speak English," said Dick with a deep sigh of relief.

"You admire this knife?" said *El Presidente*, seeing Dick's eyes drawn to it again. "It is indeed a beautiful blade. I was showing it to my friend. It has an almost incredible sharpness." He leaned back at his ease, laying the knife along the arm of his

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chair, where it gave back cold flickers of light. "And, now, your story." He indicated a seat.

"Thanks, Mr. President—"

"Your Excellency," Lopez corrected, really shocked by this North American form of address.

"Beg pardon, your Excellency," Dick repeated dutifully.

The Illustrious Defender listened; and he questioned Dick subtly and in detail. And, as usually happens in such cases, the questions stirred the boy's imagination and he told *El Presidente* not only what he knew, which wasn't much, but what he thought, and all the new suppositions, suggested by the questions, that arose in his mind now, all mixed up together. And, in his innocence, he convinced the very suspicious minds of the august one and his henchman that the whole Wynn family was in a plot with Mendez for the overthrow of the dictatorship! Abruptly, *El Presidente* ordered his daughter to show the American boy some of his curios.

"I believe with you that Mendez is plotting against the people's liberties, and that the boy's father and uncle are his agents," he said to Lopez. "You will go by airplane at once to San Juan de Avila where they will begin their journey by water. And you will see to it that men you can depend upon are engaged to accompany this so-called scientific expedition. They will understand, of course, that the boy and his uncle are on no account to return. What with jungle fevers and wild beasts, it is always easy to explain, to an inquisitive consul, the disappearance of white strangers in that country. The father is to remain here in business. His com-

pany will pay to me, that is to the nation, a worthy sum for their concession. It will be simple to watch him; and to read his mail; and later, to prevent him also from leaving the country. Now, go: and take this young fool with you. It is already past the time for my siesta."

That evening as the three Wynns sat in the hotel patio under the first stars, they heard a whirring high above them.

"An airplane, Dick," said Colonel Wynn. "From all I hear about the president of Montalba he must be a very modern and progressive man. I'm glad you met him. He bought several planes recently. That one is probably taking mail to the coast to catch the last boat."

What would the three Wynns have said if they had known that the highly "modern and progressive" Illustrious Defender of Montalba had purchased the airplanes chiefly because he hoped that a Man-Jaguar called *El Tigre de San Cristóbal* would think them big miraculous birds and be scared off by them? Or that the plane, which sailed through the azure dusk over Amarilla that evening, was carrying Lopez with his orders to make sure that Uncle Horace and Dick did not return from the jungle alive?

CHAPTER IV

MONKEY-HAT AND MACAW

"WELL, Uncle Horace," said Dick cheerily, as he dropped into his place under the canopy, "I must say they look like a precious set of ruffians."

He was speaking of the crew which Professor Wynn had assembled, at last, after much delay and difficulty, to conduct his scientific expedition up the Rio Verde.

"Ah, Dick, that remark shows how bigotedly narrow we North Americans are. Just because these men have darker skins than most of our own people, and wear strange clothing and speak a different language, you—like a true-blue Anglo-Saxon—pronounce them villains. Now, I dare say that, among their own people, these men rank as high for honesty and good behavior as many of our own rivermen."

"That isn't saying much for them," Dick answered with a chuckle. "Our own rivermen have made some wild history in their time! Anyway, it isn't their complexions or their clothes that get my eye, Uncle. It's their expressions. And the scars! That long lank fellow with the pole didn't get that fearful machete cut across his face splitting kindling for his wife's cook stove!"

Dick was referring to the leader of the crew, one of three brothers named Perez whom Professor

Wynn mistakenly supposed he had engaged for the trip. The "Brothers Perez," as they called themselves, had really already been engaged by Señor Lopez before ever the Wynns reached the river. Lopez had encountered them in the courtyard of an inn at the port and had quickly seen that they were good cutthroats just made for his purpose; and a handful of silver for two of them, and a new rifle for the third, had settled the business amicably. The Brothers Perez had agreed to see to it that Professor Wynn and his nephew did not return alive from the unknown country about the headwaters of the Verde.

"I admit the tall fellow is not handsome," Uncle Horace smiled. "But I am so amused by his name. They call him Little Perez. The short man, there, is José Perez. And we are waiting for a third brother named Juan, who is shorter. Juan has gone to collect some of his valuable property."

"Oh, I didn't know there were three of them." Dick had been more interested in exploring the village than in engaging the crew.

"Yes. Juan Perez, very short; José Perez; a little less short; and the third brother, very tall, nicknamed Little Perez because of his height. I engaged Juan first: and he brought me the two others. It appears that their home is somewhere in the upper region, and they know this tricky river well."

"Who is that?" Dick asked suddenly. He had been watching a small rowboat coming out from the shore and saw, now, that it was headed directly for the *Estrella* as their large boat was named.

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Professor Wynn rubbed his spectacles and adjusted his field glasses—he was extremely short sighted—and peered out from under the awning.

“Ah! Now we shall soon be off,” he remarked contentedly. “That will be Juan Perez bringing our passenger, Señor Gonsalvo, an elderly gentleman, most courtly in manner, who begged me to carry him as far as his rubber plantation somewhere up the river.”

“Humph,” Dick grunted. “I wish he were a boy. You’re awfully much O.K., Uncle Horace, and I love being on a hike with you. But you are forty-eight, you know! And I’m sixteen.” Then, suddenly, he saw something which made him forget the hardship of being the only boy on this expedition. “Oh! say! Look there!” he shouted and, ducking out from under the awning, he dashed along the planking which made a deck on each side of the open hold. He barely glanced at Señor Gonsalvo, a tall, rather portly gentleman with light-brown eyes, reddish-blond hair and a curled mustache. His eyes were all for the swarthy little man, Juan Perez, who now stood on deck, saying *adios* to the negro departing with the boat.

Juan Perez wore a long poncho and a wide-brimmed, high-crowned sombrero. Dick had seen him draw his poncho aside—to let something rush out and up onto his hat. That something was a tiny marmoset! It perched on Juan’s hat brim, took hold of the band with its tiny fingers, and, perhaps for greater security, twined its tail round its master’s neck. A moment later, a large, brilliantly beautiful red and blue macaw fluttered up, with many shrieks,

from the rail, where it had landed from the boat, and perched on Juan's shoulder. These were Juan's "valuable properties," whose collection had delayed the starting of the expedition for a couple of hours! With his rifle and machete and the clothes he stood up in, they constituted all the earthly possessions of Juan Perez.

There was a queer pleasant little sound, not so much a giggle as a gurgle, which was characteristic of Dick whenever his sense of humor and his sentiment were appealed to at the same time. He had gurgled when Mendez told him about visiting the old family servant and hastily dressing in the fog-wrapped cab. He gurgled now as he looked at Juan's hat. The huge brim was slit, on the right side, to allow the marmoset's tail to thrust through and anchor on Juan's neck. On the left side, it was bashed and tied up to the top of the crown to make room for the macaw to sit erect on his shoulder. Dick, who loved the wild creatures of the wood even more than most boys, was agreeably touched by the sad condition of that once noble sombrero, mutely testifying to its owner's consideration for the comfort of his pets. And he was amused, too. No matter if the swarthy face of Juan Perez was a shade more villainous than the ill-favored countenances of his two brothers—Dick liked him on the spot.

"Hullo, Señor Monkey-Hat," he said, and impulsively held out his hand.

The little man gave him a sly but piercing look, then grinned affably and shook hands. Juan Perez was the brother whom Lopez had interviewed and

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with whom he had made his shameful bargain. But the fact that Juan Perez was going to kill Dick, later on, did not prevent him from feeling friendly toward Dick now. Murder, with him, was a matter of money, not of malice!

"What bird gave you that feather for your hat?" Dick wanted to know.

"You like my Pio?" the little man asked, beaming.

"Is his name Pio? And what's Polly called?" pointing to the parrot.

"She Concepción." Hearing her name, the macaw spread her wings and screamed. "Spik Spanish?"

Dick nodded. "A little," modestly.

"Me. I spik Inglese. One time, two year Trinidad. Learn much Inglese."

"Oh, you've been to Trinidad, eh? Are you a revolutionist?" Dick was remembering a remark of his father's, that the population of the island of Trinidad was one-half ex-presidents, and one-half men who were plotting to be presidents, of South American republics! Having asked the question as a joke he was surprised to see how seriously Señor Monkey-Hat took it.

"No, no, señor!" The little man was voluble in his loyalty to the Illustrious Defender. Let all revolutionists cook in their own gore. Long live *El Presidente!* He glanced nervously from side to side, as if even the wind and the river currents were spies to carry his words far away to the old dictator in the fortress of Amarilla. Apparently he took alarm from this turn in the conversation; for, after giving Dick another darkly suspicious look, he became as uncommunicative as a clam.

The boat was under weigh now. Juan Perez put his rifle in the hold in an upright position and stuck his hat on its muzzle. Pio whimpered and scolded at this separation from his master, but was pacified presently with kind words and a Brazil nut. Concepción fluttered to the rail, close to the hat and Pio, and screamed her indignation.

"Poor Concepción! Bad Juan! Sugar! Much sugar!" She shrieked the words over and over again, until Juan dug some brown sugar out of his pouch and stopped her mouth. Like most of her tribe, the big macaw was not hospitable to friendly advances from strangers. She drove Dick off with a string of violent Spanish oaths, and by making swift jabs at him with her formidable beak. He had better luck with Pio. The tiny monkey chattered at him agreeably and reached out its delicate fingers for nuts; but all his efforts to induce it to leave the hat and come to his shoulder failed. In fact, Dick dared not go too near that hat; for Concepción would swoop at him with open beak, screaming anathemas.

"They think it's their hat," he said, laughingly, to Juan.

"Oh, *si, si!*" The little man called back from his perch on the bench, where he plied his pole vigorously. "I teach Pio and Concepción to stay with sombrero. Some time, like now, I not can have Pio on head and Concepción on shoulder. I not can work hard so. Then I put sombrero one safe place; and Pio and Concepción stay with sombrero till Juan come back. No man but me can touch sombrero. Concepción not like. *She let not!*"

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As the days passed, Dick found this to be true. After a time Pio would run off Juan's hat brim, only, however, if Juan were wearing the hat, and swing from his master's shoulder to Dick's. At such times Concepción would scold furiously at "bad Pio" and even snap at his tail. It was not that she disliked Dick personally: but she was a careful old bird. Concepción trusted no man on earth save Juan Perez. She treated his brothers with no more courtesy than she accorded Dick.

The voyage up the long, enormously wide stretch of the lower river was uneventful. Dick saw only a few crocodiles and alligators, though sometimes he was kept awake, when he wanted to nap, by the deafening din of their barking.

Two days after the boat had passed beyond the farthest frontier town and was now being poled upward between solid green walls of jungle, Señor Gonsalvo informed Dick and Professor Wynn that, if all went well, they would reach the landing at his rubber plantation toward evening the next day.

"I am much troubled about you, my good friends," he said. "I wish you would stay with me and abandon your expedition. I have seen other strangers pass upward into that country of the jaguar and the poisoned arrow." He shook his head sadly. "But, *amigos*, I have seen none return!"

"It is time that rule was broken," said Uncle Horace cheerfully.

"You see," Dick explained, "all the Wynns like to take chances. Oh, not just to be silly or to show off, but to do something interesting. The trouble with safe things is that generally they aren't any

fun. What is the good of being safe if you're bored? I know a boy back home who would jump into this river just because it's risky, so that he could tell folks about how he dared the eleven varieties of crocodiles to come on."

"He would be a very foolish boy," Señor Gonsalvo interrupted, "for the crocodiles would, as you say it in English, take his dare!"

"Now, if *I* ever did a thing like that," Dick went on, "I'd be *ashamed* to tell about it. I'd feel like a fool. You won't catch *me* taking a bath in old Lady Verde. We Wynns take our chances *carefully*." He grinned.

Yet, that very afternoon, Dick suddenly threw the family motto about "careful chances" overboard, and himself with it, and dived headfirst among the eleven varieties. It happened thus. For several days, indeed ever since the boat had entered the upper river, there had been an almost continuous echo of thunder from those mighty peaks in the distance. To-day the storm apparently wearied of pacing back and forth within the skyflung rock boundaries of the Andean "Thunder Country," and sped down along the winding river channel. The bright blue overhead was snatched away by gigantesque black hands. Clouds of night, rimmed with sulphur, smothered the sun, darkened the water, and toned to slate the olive, jade, and emerald of the jungle growth along the banks. A wind of terrific velocity bore down through the darkness, churning the river's surface and beating the boat about. And, in its wake, came the most gorgeous lightning Dick had ever seen; and rain drops as large and heavy as big hailstones.

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In making a dash to secure his hat, Juan Perez had been just a moment too late. The first wild gust swept away the sombrero with little Pio staunchly clinging to it. Dick, who had made an ineffectual grab for it, did not hesitate an instant, but leaped into the water after it. Probably all that saved him was the storm: for this part of the river teemed with crocodiles and alligators. Now, doubtless, they had taken refuge in the mudbanks of the shore and on the islands. The swift current aided Dick in reaching the hat; to which Pio clung, whimpering with terror. But he had hard work of it in swimming back to the boat. Little Perez, calling to him to throw up an arm, cast a rope in cowboy style and lassoed him by the shoulder. Señor Gonsalvo, who had seized a rifle, stood on the platform scanning the waters for the upthrust of a man-eater's head. This was a useless precaution, but there was nothing else he could do. Uncle Horace, whose nearsightedness made him helpless in such emergencies, watched through his spyglass, pale to the lips, and shouted encouraging words which the wind drowned. Juan had his hands full with Concepción, whom he had stopped not a moment too soon from swooping after the hat. She could never have breasted that gale back to the boat. He held her firmly by the feet while she screamed with a heartrending, almost human, note of frenzied grief:

"Pio! Pio! Pio! Poor Concepción!"

Juan had no faith in the attempted rescue. The tears streamed down his face.

"Ah, señor," he moaned to Gonsalvo, "of what use is the rifle? My Pio is gone. My Pio will be

dead. Señor, I am a good all-round man. Señor, I am a man who stands upon his own feet. *Si*, señor, a tree of a man! But I weep for my Pio."

"The young *Norte-Americano* is brave," said Little Perez, when he had pulled Dick to safety. "You save the monkey of my brother. *Gracias, señor.*"

"*Si*," José Perez nodded, "the young señor slaps the face of *caimán* and *crocodilo*." Under these names he mentioned two of the hugest and most ferocious of the "eleven varieties" which Dick had so recently said would keep him forever out of Rio Verde's waters!

"Bravo! Splendid! Such courage! Such skill! Ah, youth is magnificent! The generosity of young manhood risking life with a smile for a great cause, or for one little helpless creature! I embrace you!" Señor Gonsalvo clasped the dripping wet Dick enthusiastically in his arms. "Ah, my boy, you did not take *that* chance carefully! Now, at last, I begin to understand the *Norte-Americanos*. It is only their words which are cold. Their words are all business, matter of fact, of the brain, not the heart, per cents! But when something happens *quick*, and they have no time for words, ah, then, like us, they act from the heart! Professor Wynn, are you not proud of this boy?"

Uncle Horace stammered a reply. He was almost as embarrassed by being asked if he were proud of Dick, as Dick was at all the praise. The Wynns were not a demonstrative family.

"Are you cold, Dick?" was all he could think of to say. And Dick laughed. Señor Gonsalvo rolled

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his bright little eyes and tugged at his reddish mustache. "Are you cold?" he repeated to himself. Really, these North Americans were an amazing people!

Juan, muttering his ecstatic *gracias*, had his hands full with the drenched Pio and the frantic Concepción. The macaw apparently blamed everybody on the boat for the tragic event, which had so terribly distressed her. Her curses were frightful to hear. She swooped over the whimpering marmoset and ran her bill along his head and back to assure herself that he was all right. Then she tweaked his tail and scolded him roundly. Juan tucked Pio away to dry and get warm in his poncho. Concepción examined the hat and bit a piece out of it, with loud harsh words. She scolded Juan, and shrieked unprintable things at Dick. Eventually she allowed Juan to pacify her with sugar; but not until she had nipped his fingers once, sharply, as a final warning to him not to permit things to occur again which would upset her nerves.

That night, while the travelers slept, Brothers Perez held a conference.

"I will be sorry to kill the young *Norte-Americano* who saved my Pio," said Juan.

"It is always a pity to kill a brave one who has done you no harm," José agreed. "But their rifles and food and the boat will be valuable loot."

"Nevertheless, I shall be sorry," said Juan. "And, also, if we save the boy, we shall have one more brave man in the band. He is a good shot, too."

"Perhaps," said Little Perez, "it is a pity that the señor at San Juan de Avila paid us to kill them.

If he were not of the government, we could now forget our engagements with him. But it is better not to make the government angry with us; because, after all, there may be no revolution, since we don't know where our *capitán*, *El Tigre*, is: or even if he is still living."

"And there is always the loot on the boat," José repeated. "If the government has captured *El Tigre*, we shall need this loot. For our *capitán* will then be dead and will not return to lead us in raids on rich towns."

"Nevertheless, I shall be sorry," Juan reiterated. "Pio also will be sorry. But Concepción is like you. She will not care."

CHAPTER V

THE STRANGE BEAST IN THE MOONLIGHT

Now it happened fortunately that Señor Gonsalvo was wakeful that night. His hammock hung near to the place which Brothers Perez had chosen for their conference. He heard a few sentences and drew his conclusions correctly as to the rest. When the boat got under weigh again in the early morning, he told his news in low tones to Professor Wynn and Dick.

"There is but one thing to do," he said. "You must tell them that you will remain at my plantation for a week; and give them permission to do some hunting. Tell them they may have all the roasted peccary they can kill, with a prize for him who kills the most. Also, that if they prefer to hunt by water they may have the boat, after my servants have brought up to my house all your personal goods. If you are lucky, señores, they will decide to steal the boat and make off and not trouble you again! In that case you can, later, take one of my boats for your journey, if I can find some men for you. At any rate, in my hacienda, under my protection, these villains will not attempt to attack you."

"I am deeply indebted to you, Señor Gonsalvo," Uncle Horace said gratefully. "We shall be safe

for a few days, thanks to your generosity. But I am troubled about the future of my expedition."

"*Amigo*," Gonsalvo replied, "the Spanish brought here a proverb they had learned from the Arabs. It is: 'No man has seen the sun of to-morrow.' In Montalba, señor, we live only one day at a time. Why be anxious about a future which may never arrive to us?"

"Señor Gonsalvo," said Dick, "you say José Perez mentioned *El Tigre*. Who is *El Tigre*?"

"Many would like to know the answer to that question, my boy! For my part, I am not a superstitious man. I am even a dilettante in the sciences. I know a little of botany and even of biology. And I do not believe in the existence of a man-jaguar. No. But I think *El Tigre* is a shrewd and crafty fellow who has invented all these tales about himself; an outlaw like these Perez brothers, but with more brains. His home is in the mountains. All our bad men come from the mountains," he concluded gloomily.

"Some good men, too," Dick said. "General de Mendez is an *Andino*."

"Mendez!" Gonsalvo almost barked at him. Both suspicion and alarm were in the rapid glances he cast, first at Dick, then at Uncle Horace.

"Yes. Do you know him? Dad and I met him in London two or three months ago. You see, Dad fought with the British on the eastern front, while Mendez Bey was fighting with the Turks. Do you know him?" he asked again.

"I have met him," warily, "once, when I was in Trinidad, some years before the war. He was a

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very young man then, full of dreams and vigor. Young; but already dangerous," he murmured rather to himself than to the others. "Another of those dark men. They are terrible, those dark men from the mountains! I am no coward, señores; but I am afraid of these dark *Andinos*!"

"Why?" Dick wanted to know.

"They are swarthy with the fierce Indian blood. They are strong and swift and ambitious, with the terrific virility of the mountain climate. Oh, yes, there are fierce men among the *llaneros*, our cowboys, also. But, we say, when a *llanero* has lost his horse he is tame, for he will not walk a step; but shoot an *Andino's* horse from under him, and he will swing his bridle over the planets; he will ride on to his goal. He is like the typhoon. He respects nothing in his path."

"Isn't your president an *Andino*?"

"He is indeed," Gonsalvo admitted gloomily. Then he added quickly, "Long live the Illustrious Defender! But tell me, what was Mendez doing when you met him?"

"He said he was going to study something in the museums of Europe."

"An *Andino* in a museum! Such a thing has never occurred in the history of Montalba, since the ancestor of Mendez Bey, one Don Pedro de Mendez, first looked at its shores from the poop deck of the ship of Columbus! I am afraid of those dark men from the mountains."

"But why? What do they do?" Dick asked.

"Revolutions! Always revolutions! Armies of Brothers Perez overrunning everything with rifle

and machete and grab bag! It would be well if Mendez and *El Tigre* would exterminate each other, up there among the high rocks of their own Andes; so that an elderly gentleman, like me, with a plantation, should be no more disturbed with dreams of liberty and glory echoing from his youth, but be left to gather and market his rubber in peace!"

"Señor Gonsalvo, you're afraid that, if there were a big revolution, you'd forget all about rubber and join it!" Dick said shrewdly.

"No, no!" Gonsalvo protested. "I am a brave man; but I am sixty-two. I have grown wise with age. 'Liberty' is a fine horn blast to stir the ignorant populace; and 'honor' and 'glory' are the pretty catchwords of the military. But I have seen much; and I adopt now the bugle call of the commercial classes and the men of property. I also cry '*Give me peace with graft*'! For peace with graft is better than dreams that never come true! No, no! Long live the Illustrious Defender, and the well-priced rubber of Felipe Gonsalvo!"

At this Dick gurgled with carefree delight, as if no such thing as an assassin existed in his world.

The boatmen were unprepared for the idea suggested by Gonsalvo, and they accepted it with alacrity. With the aid of some of his Indian servants they even carried the more valuable portions of the expedition's equipment along the two-mile trail to the house, which stood within a large enclosure fenced with *moriche* palms. Juan Perez had elected to hunt peccary in the jungle behind the hacienda; so he gave his sombrero and pets

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to Dick to care for. Dick deposited the hat on a table in the living room. Pio seemed satisfied with this arrangement, but Concepción, who was always conservative and opposed to any change on principle, screamed "bad Juan!" for a full half hour.

The first night at the hacienda passed without incident. Until afternoon of the next day nothing occurred to increase the anxiety of Señor Gonsalvo and his guests. About two o'clock Professor Wynn, having discovered that the case containing his preservatives for insects had been left in the boat, set off for the shore to fetch it. Gonsalvo and Dick accompanied him.

"M'ff, m'ff," Dick grunted, sniffing. "They sure do smell!"

Gonsalvo laughed. "The rancid musky odor of the crocodiles is not pleasant. It is, however, seldom so strong as to-day. A number of them must be quite near. To the east of the hacienda, a little way off, is a swamp. In years of heavy flood, as this has been, they go with the overflow into that hollow and remain there till the sun dries up the waters. Then they go back to the river. You would be interested to see a large *crocodilo* or *caimán* making his way overland."

"Are they so slow and awkward on land as is commonly reported?" Uncle Horace asked.

"No. That is an error. They can walk quite well."

"How big do they really grow? Are they ever more than twenty feet long, if as big as that?"

"Twenty feet is a large *caimán*. But the *crocodilo* grows much larger. I have killed one that measured

thirty-three feet. But he was exceptional. They are very ferocious."

"Do they really attack men?" Dick asked.

"Somehow, one is always learning, now, that animals once thought savage really run away when they see a man."

"They attack *food*. A man is meat, like a tapir or a peccary. And those giant reptiles are always hungry. A couple of rolls and a cup of coffee would be no breakfast for a thirty-foot crocodile! But, apart from hunger, yes, I believe they are savage. We have three wild beasts in this jungle which I believe will attack any living animal, including man, whether they are hungry or not. They are the crocodile, the anaconda, and the jaguar. The worst, perhaps, is the anaconda, because he is so crafty. He hangs from the trees, or lies hidden in the water close to the shore. The tapir comes down to drink. The anaconda pins him by the nose, then whirls his coils around him, crushes him to death, to a jelly, and gulps him down. I have lost men from this plantation to the crocodile, the anaconda, and the jaguar."

"I'd like to get the chance of a shot at any one of them," said Dick.

"That should be easy," he was told.

They were walking back up the trail when one of Gonsalvo's Indian rubber-gatherers met them and told Gonsalvo that all the other peons had deserted the hacienda and gone off under the leadership of Juan Perez.

"Gone? Gone where?" Gonsalvo stared in blank amazement.

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"This morning Juan Perez told us all that his *capitán* was near. He had seen a man over there," gesturing, "so now all have gone with Juan Perez to his *capitán*."

"*What is this capitán?*" the old gentleman demanded.

"Señor, he is *El Tigre de San Cristóbal*! And I am also going. Señor, it is the revolution which comes now! Because I have goodwill to you, I wait to tell you. Also, it is now decided by the men, José and Little Perez, and the others of the boat, to kill you with your friends; and to take the hacienda as well as the boat. This they will do when it grows dark, no doubt. *Adiós, señor.*" He ran off.

The three white men regarded one another in dumb consternation for some moments.

"Well, *amigos*," Gonsalvo said presently, "we will go on to the house and arm ourselves and fight. But it will be a fight for principle only. We are dead men."

"Oh, maybe not!" said Dick. His blue eyes sparkled like steel and his nostrils whitened and quivered slightly. And he felt wonderfully fit, and as cool as if a breeze had blown over him. Real danger always keyed Dick up to his highest point of efficiency.

"I am too nearsighted to be useful with a rifle," Uncle Horace lamented. "But I have a good arm and I can swing a machete. If one of the blackguards will only come close enough for me to see his villainous skull, I can split it for him."

The first thing was to load all the firearms in the house, and to gather whatever weapons of "cold

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steel" could be found, an axe, two machetes, a few heavy knives, and lay them on a table. Then the two men and Dick went about fastening windows and doors. The house was on a slight rise in the land; a sort of spreading hummock that was kept bare of trees and where the grass was not allowed to grow long enough to shelter snakes. The elevation gave the defenders a view of all approaches.

In the yard below the garden, just outside the palm fence at the back, a score of pigs and chickens rooted and pecked. The strongly built pen and chicken house stood at the further end of their yard. The presence of Pio and the talkative Concepción in the house was evidence enough of the danger to come. Juan Perez expected to return soon for his hat and his pets! Dick smiled as he fed the macaw, from a safe distance, on the sugar she screamed for. He was listening to Gonsalvo, who had not ceased to rave against revolutions since he first recovered his breath after the Indian's tidings.

"Now you see why I hate revolutions! One's servants leave in the hope of loot. You are lucky if they don't first kill you and take everything. Every peon who taps a rubber tree, runs off to become a bandit; or a general—'for Liberty and for Fatherland'! Bandit and general is the same thing! Once I, too, was such a fool. I will die to-night; so it does no harm to tell it. The Illustrious Defender will not hear. Ah, but *he* is the prize beast of the jungle, that Illustrious One! Graft, poison, torture, terror—ah! Well, I joined with that fierce swarthy dreamer, your friend Mendez. He was at least no bandit. No, a gentleman of

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noble family, and an honorable man. We set out to make a clean house in Montalba! But the Illustrious Defender is rich and powerful; and traitors are many and cheap! Mendez's coup fails because he is betrayed. He and I escape to Trinidad. He goes off I know not where. And I buy peace from the Illustrious One. With every increase in my rubber the price of my pardon mounts! There are no true patriots among these revolutionists. Only Mendez—but he failed. This *Tigre* is only another *Andino* bandit with a machete! If he succeeds he, too, will graft on rubber and coffee, and so forth!"

"Cheer up!" Dick called to him. "Maybe we'll keep alive till he arrives. And then we'll have at least three chances of killing him. After we've skinned this jaguar we'll take his gang and start a revolution of our own. It isn't impossible, you know. Men have done it before."

"No. It is not impossible," Gonsalvo agreed. "Ah, ha! there is Little Perez. I see him first because he is the tallest. Yes, yes. Now they come! All by the front way. That is better. Still, I will look once from the back."

In a few moments he was heard to shout, "It is a miracle! Look! Look!"

Dick raced to the back window, followed by Uncle Horace with his field glasses.

At first glance it seemed that the ground was in furrows and that the furrows were moving. A second look revealed a school, or a pack, of alligators, coming up from the drying mud of the swamp on their way to the river. The grunts, and probably the odor, of the hogs lured the huge

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reptiles toward the hacienda. There might have been a dozen or more. Dick could not be sure that he had not counted some of them twice. They walked at a fair pace, and paused occasionally to open their vast mouths as if in anticipation of their meal grunting near by. The pigs were squealing with alarm now.

"They'll bash that fence down with their powerful tails in no time," Dick said.

The first crashing thwack of tail by a giant crocodile in the lead split several of the palm boards but did not make a gateway for the crowding scaly creatures to enter. The sound startled the eight men from the boat, who were about to come into the front yard. No doubt, knowing that all Gonsalvo's peons had deserted him, they were amazed and alarmed to hear such a noise coming from the back of the house. They consulted hastily together; then they separated and began to circle the yard. A negro named Bobo was in the lead as they turned round the back of the premises to investigate. He and his followers ran stoopingly in order to have the shelter of the fence from the rifles within the house. Bobo was armed only with a machete, as were most of the others. Little Perez and José had rifles.

A scream of terror rent the air.

"Crocodilo! Crocodilo!"

In another second the frenzied face of Bobo appeared over the fence. He forgot the rifles indoors in the mysterious horror of the swamp-sojourners' migration; the yard offered the only shelter.

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"Ah, ha!" murmured Gonsalvo, his bright eyes filled with an almost gleeful vengeance. He shot Bobo through the head. At that moment a section of the fence crashed down and the negro's body lay for an instant on the flattened paling. Only for an instant. Dick's eyes blinked automatically at the horror of that body's fate, as a long snout opened and closed.

"Ah, ha! Snapped him down like a bluebottle!" Gonsalvo cried softly. "*Amigo*, I present you with another!" His rifle spoke again and another man dropped.

Four of the survivors recovered their common sense enough to turn and dash at full speed back the way they had come. The two others—José and Little Perez—made for the stone pig pen and shut themselves in.

"Too bad the pigs are not inside. They are savage, my pigs. We would have man-eating pork for breakfast," said Gonsalvo, vindictively. Dick said nothing. He was in a curious mood, vacillating between exhilaration and a horror almost nauseating. He did not want to have as fierce and vengeful a spirit as his kind host had now revealed; nor yet to possess the scientific detachment of Uncle Horace, who could watch the attack of a band of migrating crocodiles on men and swine without a tremble of the wrists that held up his field glasses. Yet he could not wish that he had not seen it.

The four men, and such of the swine as had escaped, were now fleeing toward the river. The alligators followed them.

"There are not so many as I thought," said Dick.

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"Only eight or ten large ones and a few small ones. At first, I thought the ground was covered with them."

"I wish they had eaten José and Little Perez," Gonsalvo said. "Those two have rifles. Since *El Tigre* and his bandits are coming this way, we have no chance to survive. But I wish to kill as many as possible before I die."

For two hours more they stood watching the pig-pen door, ready to shoot if a Perez emerged. Then dark fell suddenly and they could see nothing. Though they strained their ears, they heard no sound—but the occasional screaming of *Concepción*.

"It is full moon to-night," Uncle Horace remarked.

"*Si, amigo*. If we last till then we will have light enough for one more fight."

Some time later out of the darkness came a voice.

"Señores. Do not shoot. I bring a message from *El Tigre*."

"That's Juan," said Dick.

"Do not answer. Listen longer where the voice comes from, then we fire together," Gonsalvo ordered.

"Señores! Do not shoot. *El Tigre* is your friend. He offers protection." The voice was nearer now.

"I know these protective bandits!" Gonsalvo growled. "Let him come nearer yet."

"Señores! I am your friend, Juan Perez." A pause, then nearer still. "Señores! How is the health of my Pio?"

This was too much for Gonsalvo's wrath. He

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fired twice in quick succession. No sound answered from the yard.

"The moon comes now," said Gonsalvo, a half hour or so later. "Before long I hope it will show me that scoundrel's body in the yard."

But when the moon did lift over the tree tops, to pour a light as white as day into the enclosure, it showed a sight which made the three watchers in the dark house forget all about the body of Juan Perez.

"What are those starry things fluttering above the fence?" Uncle Horace asked. "They are not fireflies."

Lines of white sparks quivered in the air; and then, from beneath them, out of sight, a horse snorted.

"Your fireflies are the tips of *lanceras*, *amigo*," said Gonsalvo. "That is the war weapon of our Indians."

"*El Tigre* has arrived, I gather," said Uncle Horace, "and with some two score men."

"The pig-pen door is open," Dick remarked. Evidently Gonsalvo saw, or thought he saw, a target; for he fired. It was his last shot that night. There was a leap, a gasp of rage, a brief scuffle, and he fell to the floor. At the same moment Dick and his uncle were seized and disarmed. A match was struck, revealing the machete scar on the countenance of Little Perez. José held the match, while his brother bound the hands of the unconscious Gonsalvo. Then they secured Professor Wynn, a helpless victim without his spectacles, which had been knocked off.

"Why did you shoot? Now *El Tigre* will be

angry," said Juan Perez. He had easily taken Dick's rifle in the noiseless rush of the brothers on the three defenders of the house.

"You are going to kill us?" asked Dick.

"I do not know. *El Tigre* says to capture you. We have done it. Look. He comes now. *El Tigre*, who walks alone!"

Dick stared out of the window. First the starry tips of the long *lanceras* tossed and flickered, as a small band of Indians, naked save for their loin cloths, scaled the palm fence and alighted within. Next the gate was swung open and a score of riders in ponchos and sombreros galloped into the yard and reined in their ponies. Then, as the shout "*El Tigre! El Tigre!*" swelled hoarsely from their throats, an immense strange beast rose into the pearly air, in a high, swift, graceful leap over the palings, and landed in their midst. Dick saw now that the extraordinary looking animal, with large black spots on a light ground, was really two. It was apparently a big jaguar mounted on the rarest and most beautiful of the equine tribe, a milk white horse dappled on its legs and haunches in black.

Torches appeared now amid the confused movement below. The jaguar sprang from the saddle. Heavy feet thumped on the veranda. Glare and the odor of pitchy wood—the gleam of dark eyes and white teeth—the sweeping folds of ponchos—the shrieking profanity of Concepción awakened by the intruding torches—the tapping of long spurs—these were like the fantastic background in a tale of magic; a fit setting for the figure which Dick, his eyes steely bright, his nostrils white, watched

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advance to the corner where Brothers Perez held their prisoners. With that cool sense of detachment characteristic of brave men in peril, Dick noted the black rosette-like spots on the tawny pelt of *El Tigre* and thought them beautiful.

CHAPTER VI

THE TIGER IN HIS TRUE COLORS

THE strange beast, advancing upright through the flickering phantasy of red torch fire and shadow, said something in Spanish to Juan Perez. His voice was husky and guttural and Dick did not catch the meaning of his words. As he found himself instantly released, he supposed the words had been a command to that effect. Dick Wynn did not believe in the existence of a creature part jaguar and part man. He knew that this beast on two legs was a man, and a Montalban, in masquerade. Yet he, too, felt the spell which *El Tigre* exercised over his followers grouped in that room. An atmosphere of peril, and of dynamic power, went out from the figure—not tall, not commanding in that way, rather small, indeed—which stood there wrapped in the beautiful jaguar pelt, his dark eyes burning through the jaguar's eyeholes, his features covered by the skin flap of the jaguar's face, to the mouth, where strong white teeth showed in a curiously modeled jaw.

"That's his own mouth," Dick was thinking: "but, if it were twice as large, it would look enough like a tiger's!"

He recalled what Gonsalvo had said about the terrible force of the dark men from the Andes, and he remembered that same effect of force in the per-

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sonality of Mendez Bey. If these two *Andinos* ever met in strife! *There* would be a clash worth seeing!

"What does the fellow look like, Dick?" Uncle Horace asked. "Confound Brothers Perez! They knocked off my glasses, probably smashed them underfoot. And I'm as blind as as a bat without them."

Before Dick could answer *El Tigre* gave another husky guttural command. Little Perez and José began immediately to search the floor; and presently José got up from under the table with the spectacles.

"The monster evidently understands English," said Professor Wynn coolly, adjusting his glasses.

"I hope so," Dick answered: "because I haven't Spanish enough to tell him what I think of him. And I'd certainly like to give him an earful, before he orders somebody to knife me."

"You shall have that privilege," said *El Tigre*, in Spanish. "Come, now. You are a brave young man, you tell me. You have no fear of the Tiger? Step up, here, then, within reach of his claws; and say to him what is in your mind! The golden-haired little boy from the North, who is so brave!"

Of course, that last phrase about a golden-haired boy made Dick furious. He flushed crimson with embarrassment and rage. He forgot all about the Wynn habit of taking chances carefully. He rushed at *El Tigre*, full tilt, his fists up. He would land one good smashing blow on that sneering jaw, and then die! Golden-haired little boy—!"

"You insolent, insulting, play-acting fake!" he shouted, and struck.

His hands hit nothing. With incredible swiftness

—he had not seen *El Tigre* make a move—his wrists were caught in mid-air. Another second and they were down at his sides, held there in a grip round his body which squeezed the breath out of him.

“Be thankful that I prevented you from striking me in the face. No man does that to me.”

The Spanish words brought an instantaneous response from the Jaguar’s men.

“Kill him! Kill him!” they shouted.

“Silence!” *El Tigre* spoke the one word without raising his voice; and they obeyed.

“I’ll be the one man who does!” Dick fairly gurgled, his voice was so choked with anger.

“Young man, if you could see the face under this jaguar skin you would not wish to strike it. That face is not so gentle as the face of the jaguar.”

“Bah!” Dick roared at him, out of patience with this masquerading bandit’s conceit in his own fierceness. “If I had my hands free, I’d tear off that fur flap and have a look at your terrible fierce face! Rot!”

“So?” *El Tigre*, holding Dick like a vise of iron, paused for a moment. Then he said, “You are rash. And now you pay for your rashness. Lift the fur flap and look!” He released the boy’s hands, though he still held him firmly round the body.

Dick was cool now. There had been something chilling, even to his hot blood, in the intonations of *El Tigre’s* voice; something which had made the permission to look at the Man-Jaguar’s face sound like a death sentence.

“Better take warning, my rash young friend.”

The words, with their covert sneer, ended Dick’s

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momentary hesitation. His face was pale now and his blue eyes were bright.

"One can die but once," he said, carelessly; and, seizing the fur flap by its lowest edge, he threw it back over the top of the Tiger's head. He saw the cruelly shaped jaw part in a wide glistening smile: he saw two burning tawny eyes flashing into his with mischievous mirth. He gasped, unable to speak. *El Tigre* chuckled.

"Ah ha! Ah ha! We meet again, Señor Boy! You got a—what you call?—jolt, when you saw that jaguar's face, huh?"

"Mendez!" Dick cried. "Mendez Bey!"

"Ah ha! Ah ha!" Mendez hugged him tight and pranced about with him in an impromptu dance, laughing like a school boy.

"I fooled you that time, Dick Wynn, huh? Don't you say no! Because when Mendez tries to fool somebody he likes to succeed. Ah ha! Ah ha!"

"Yes, you did." Dick began to laugh, too. "Mendez, you—you awful scoundrel!"

"Ah ha, ah ha!"

"Dick, what's this?" Uncle Horace wanted to know.

"Why, it's Mendez, Uncle Horace! I've told you about him!"

"Yes. But you never told me he went in for—er—for upsetting the theories of zoölogy."

Mendez dropped Dick and grasped Professor Wynn's hand.

"My! My! I am pleased to meet you. Another Wynn! And you all look alike. Zoölogy is not all Mendez upsets when he gets busy. Ah ha!"

Just then Juan Perez humbly intruded himself.

"My *capitán*, a thousand excuses; but the other prisoner now wakes up."

"Wakes up? Who has been sleeping through this noise, which makes even a parrot curse?"

"The old man who owns this ranch, *capitán*. He did not fall asleep naturally, but because it was necessary to hit him in the head. He is a very fierce old man, *capitán*."

Wheeling about, Mendez saw Gonsalvo being assisted to his feet by Little Perez.

"Put him in a chair. Get water," Mendez ordered. "You are savages to hit an old man on the head!"

"He was very fierce," Juan repeated plaintively, as he ran out for water.

"H'm—m—" Gonsalvo groaned. "My poor head."

"Now, now, señor," said Mendez. "Nothing is the matter with your head. But that poor fellow, who hit it, has to get a new machete. That hard head of yours broke his blade."

"Eh? What? Who is that?" Gonsalvo straightened up, and blinked at the dark face bending over him. The light of recognition came to Mendez's eyes first.

"Felipe Gonsalvo!" He grasped him by the shoulders.

"What? What? You know me? You—?" Gonsalvo stared hard. His mouth fell open. For a moment he did not speak. Then he groaned.

"Trouble! Trouble for Montalba. Trouble for poor Gonsalvo! Mendez returns."

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"Ah ha! Ah ha!" Mendez chuckled, patting his old friend's shoulder. "See how he is glad to see me, my old comrade in arms!"

"No, no!" Gonsalvo protested vigorously, even while gripping *El Tigre's* hand and beaming at him. "No. Don Diego Rafael de Mendez, trouble-maker! You are the last man in the world I want to see alive in Montalba! What are you doing here, Ralph de Mendez, all dressed up in furs like a monkey on a stick? Had the English and the Russians no bullets in the World War, that you are still alive? Did they pelt you with violets only?"

"Violets? No! In the Orient the ammunition is smells and fever germs. Ah ha!"

"Now you come home for what? To make more revolution! You come to upset the price of rubber, confound you! It is revolution that brings you and your swarm of greedy, bloody bandits to my house!"

"Revolution? What folly are you talking here?" Mendez looked both shocked and indignant. "Nothing of the sort! I am on a hunting trip with some friends. We are riding along peaceably through the jungle. But what do we hear? We hear the frantic shrieks of a woman in distress, coming from this house. Some brute of an old rubber planter has torn her from her home and loved ones, and holds her a prisoner! Like a chivalrous gentleman I put spurs to my horse! and I ride like mad to this house to rescue that fair damsel. Are you not ashamed to torture a woman?" he roared.

"Woman? Woman? Are you crazy? No woman is here," Gonsalvo protested, with a dazed look.

"Liar!" Mendez thundered. "Listen to her screams!"

The pause in the conversation was filled with shrieks from the hall.

"Poor Concepción! Poor Pio! Bad Juan! Sugar! Poor Concepción!" and the usual stream of unprintable curses.

Dick burst into shouts of laughter, in which Gonsalvo joined after attempting futilely to glare Mendez down. Uncle Horace was beaming with amusement. Since the return of his glasses he had not ceased to stare at *El Tigre* with the concentrated joy of the scientific man examining a new specimen.

"You are the same as ever, you dark-faced devil, always seeking death, and laughing!"

"Well, Felipe, I always think, I will have a good laugh to-night because to-morrow, who knows? A corpse cannot laugh." He turned sharply to his men and ordered them out: then he told the Perez brothers to cook food for himself, the Wynns and Gonsalvo. "And, you, Juan," he added, "go choke that lady in the hall!"

The room was quickly cleared and, before long, the odors of food began to seep in from the kitchen, and the gleam of cook fires in the yard to cast a reddish glow on the windows. Mendez threw his jaguar skin over a chair back and sat down at the table beside Dick.

"Well, well, Señor Boy," he said gently. "I am glad we meet again. But yet I am sorry you are here. Now you know why I advised you not to come to Montalba."

"I'm not sorry, Mendez," Dick declared. "But

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I suppose it's all off with Uncle Horace's expedition to find the white Indians."

"What?" Mendez turned quickly to Professor Wynn, who told him of the manuscript he had read in Amarilla and how he had determined to investigate the persistent rumors of white Indians in the unexplored regions about the headwaters of the Verde.

"Then I save you a lot of useless travel, Professor. In several places in South America you find albinos among the tribes. Here and there, might be some what you scientists call 'biological sports.' But there is no tribe of white Indians. Only, those who live always in the shade have not the dark reddish skin, like those who are always exposed to sun. Believe me, I am the nearest thing to a white Indian you will find in my country!"

"Mendez, were you really talking about yourself," Dick asked, "when you told me, in London, about the Jaguar of San Cristóbal?"

"With all modesty, I admit it," Mendez chuckled. "I am the one and only *Tigre*."

Gonsalvo regarded him gravely.

"Ralph," he said, "the tales told of *El Tigre* are terrible."

"Ah ha! They are! I invent most of them!" He chuckled shamelessly.

"But, my dear Ralph, what is the reason for this masquerade in a jaguar's skin; and for these stories one hears?"

"It is necessary, Felipe. Unfortunately, with running about the world, writing for papers, fighting in half a dozen countries, and getting too prominent in

the World War, and all these things, Mendez gets to be too well known. Wherever I go, no matter how quietly, somebody spots me. And then word is sent to the Illustrious Defender, telling him where I am and what I am doing. He thinks too much about me, the Illustrious One: it becomes a nuisance. I cannot hide Mendez from him. So I think it better I get myself an alibi, huh? Well, one day, I hit on this idea of the Man-Jaguar. Because of Juan Perez. Oh, yes! It is really Juan who is responsible. He says to me, '*Capitán*, you know we have a proverb about the jaguar. We say, *El Tigre* walks alone; you know only by his footprints where he has passed. *Capitán*,' he said, 'your men call you *El Tigre* because you also walk alone; you tell no one what you will do nor where you will go, but suddenly we find your tracks and then we know you are in our mountains again, and we come with our guns and machetes to fight.' Well, I thought about that," he chuckled: "then I invented the Man-Jaguar, me—to provide for Mendez an alibi, and to give that old gentleman in Amarilla something new to worry about!"

"Dick, I am wondering what is to become of us now," said Professor Wynn.

"That's easy," Dick answered. "I'm going with Mendez. And so are you."

"Dick," said Gonsalvo, "you do not know what you are saying. Mendez is my friend, yes: but I only tell you the truth when I say that a more dangerous man never lived."

"Maybe. Shouldn't be surprised. But I'm not afraid of him, nor of anything he'll get me into."

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Mendez's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"My! My! It's nice to hear that." He continued more gravely, "The truth is, I have to take you all with me because there is no safety for you here. In the mountains I can leave you with some rancher, a friend I can trust, till we know how this business of mine turns out." He shrugged his shoulders. "If I fail, if I am killed, you will have to get out of Montalba as best you can." He told them briefly what he had learned from Brothers Perez of Lopez's bargain with them. He concluded: "At dawn we march. Ah! here comes food. My good Juan is an excellent cook, a brave fighter, a smart hunter, and a reliable assassin!" He laughed merrily at Dick. "You know, he told me he likes you very much, and his monkey likes you; but he and his brothers had to kill you because they had taken money from Lopez. In their way they are absolutely honest, these Brothers Perez! But, of course, now the revolution is started, they are free from their honorable obligations to do murder for the government!"

"Mendez, you are a villain!" Gonsalvo face was suddenly crimson. He hammered on the table with fist. "A villain, I say! To tear up the country, break the peace, ruin the commerce, shed blood, with an army made of such men—savages, thieves, assassins, outlaws!" He stopped, breathless. Mendez's face wore its iron look as he answered him.

"And why not, Felipe? They were born to be men. Who made them illiterate, unable to earn a

decent living? A grafting tyrant who puts the money for schools in his own pocket! Yes, they are bad men, thieves and murderers, outlaws, who have fled from the villages and from the rural districts, fled from the labor gangs where they had to work for a few cents a day while their children starved. Oh, yes! they became bandits, ready to cut any traveler's throat for his purse. Why not? But there was one good thing in them. *They hated slavery!* They had their pride. They would not be dogs under anybody's feet. Truly, they turned their passion for freedom to a bad use. But the passion for freedom, in itself, is not bad. It is, on the contrary, the noblest thing in man. I have come to show these poor ignorant devils how to turn it to a *good* use."

"Ho, ho! You will lead them to reform, eh?" Gonsalvo mocked.

"No. I will lead many of them to death. But, with the guns and machetes of the rest, I will hold Montalba; until the wise and patriotic men of my country have worked out safeguards for the constitution, so that no tyrant can ever again seize the reins and ride for twenty years—nor twenty days—in safety over the necks of Montalbans! I look to the future, Felipe. This is the twentieth century, not the tenth. The time is with me. There is no native place for tyranny anywhere on the soil of the western hemisphere. It is time to cease the sounds of cutthroats riding at night: and the hungry cries of ragged, barefooted children. It is time to hear new sounds; peasant women laughing, laborers' tools working and building for a living wage, the

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sound of little feet in shoes going to school, the sounds of a free and happy people!"

"Dreamer! Fool! Madman! I will die here from crocodiles or assassins. I will die here with my rubber! I will not march one step with you, nor fire one shot!" Gonsalvo brought his fist down on the table with such force that the dishes clattered. Mendez jumped up, ran to the window and beckoned here and there. A moment more, and a dozen swarthy men in sombreros and ponchos, with machetes or rifles in hand, had dashed into the room. Dick caught his breath in alarm, wondering what was going to happen.

"*Amigos*," said Mendez, "what do well-trained soldiers do when they meet an officer?"

"*Capitán*, they make a gesture. So you have taught us," one answered.

"True. You see this gentleman, Señor Gonsalvo? Salute him. He is your new colonel."

Gravely, proud of their new accomplishment, the men saluted Gonsalvo. Then, at a sign of dismissal from their *capitán*, they filed out of the room.

"Ah, Ralph! I knew my fate as soon I recognized that dark face of yours." Gonsalvo pulled at his mustache to conceal a smile.

"Mendez," said Dick, laughing, "I'm going to save all my extra breath to climb hills and stairs when I'm old. I'm never going to waste any of it in arguing with you."

"My rubber! My plantation!" Gonsalvo's eyes rolled pathetically toward the ceiling, his voice was a melancholy whisper.

“Holy Smoking Moses! Who cares about your plantation? Not you! Anyway, you are no longer an infant, to be playing with rubber dolls. Ah ha! Ah ha!” Having delivered this last crack at his old friend, Mendez ordered every one to bed.

CHAPTER VII

THE JUNGLE MARCH

THEY breakfasted hastily in the first light. By full dawn they were in the saddle.

"I feel like a man again," said Gonsalvo, smiling contentedly.

"This certainly suits me down to the ground," Dick asserted. "I love to ride. I say, what's the matter?" he exclaimed, hearing Mendez's voice raised sharply. He spurred forward.

"Saffron-eyed cats!" he heard Mendez shout; then the protest was continued in Spanish. Dick found that Juan Perez was the object of the tirade. "Are you going into battle with a monkey and a parrot?" Mendez demanded. "Don't you know that bright-colored bird will be a target? She will be shot to pieces. And you also!"

"But no, *capitán*. Always my Pio and my Concepción go everywhere with me. When they hear rifles—so—patatattattat—" imitating the sound—"they jump off hat and shoulder and run inside poncho, stay very quiet inside poncho till shooting stops. *Capitán*, I am a good all-round man. *Capitán*, I am a man who stands on his own feet. But, *capitán*, I love my Pio. *Capitán*, I love my Concepción. They make glad my heart. Ah, *capitán*, of what use is it to kill government men for

liberty and much loot, if the heart is sad? I am a man like that, *capitán!*”

Mendez, stifling his mirth with difficulty, permitted Juan to keep his pets. He turned to Dick and said, with a chuckle:

“You are out with some crazy men, Dick Wynn!” Then he added, “Keep close behind my horse. The jungle is dangerous. There are many big snakes.”

“Anacondas?” Dick asked eagerly.

“Yes. We call them ‘deer-swallowers.’ A man does not easily see them. You see those big vines, hanging from the trees to the grounds?”

“Yes. They’re awfully thick-stemmed for vines,” Dick answered, his glance following Mendez’s pointing finger.

“Well, the deer-swallower hangs like that. His tail is round the branch. His head is near the ground. He is quite still, like a hanging vine. Some animal, a deer, a peccary, comes by. He grabs it with his teeth. Then he drops from the tree—swift, like lightning—and whirls around his prey, crushes it to a jelly, and swallows it. I don’t know if a man on a horse would look too big for him to tackle. But I think we better not try to find out, huh? Keep close to me and watch me. Did José give you a machete? I told him.”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“Where is your jaguar coat, Mendez?”

“Huh? Oh, it is rolled on my saddle. I don’t wear it in daylight. It is only at night that the man becomes a jaguar.” He laughed. Then there passed over his face that dark, hardening look which

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always made Dick think of iron. "Is it not a shameful thing for me to play upon the superstitious terrors of my poor ignorant countrymen? I tell you, I *feel* ashamed. But I do it for their sakes. Even my own men, who see me every day, really believe that I become something supernatural and invincible at night when I dress up in my tiger skin! From fear they follow me, fight, obey, and hesitate to betray me, even when offered much money by the government. Their children will grow up in a free country. Their children will not believe in a man-jaguar." He spurred ahead.

In less than an hour they were in the heart of the jungle. Dick was fascinated by the stretches of vast growth, where vines and giant trees were woven into a dense wall, on each side of the narrow path; and by the pockets of deep indigo shadow, which he could see here and there, like loopholes in a fortress that always faced the night. The effect was one of magic, of phantasy. Here might ogres dwell. He thought it was not so strange that men born in this country should readily believe in the existence of a man-jaguar.

"Look there, Dick!" Uncle Horace had come up with him and was eagerly indicating something in one of the pockets of shadow to the left. All the Wynns were good riders; and Professor Wynn was letting his horse look to itself while he turned his field glasses in delighted survey of the magnificent scene about him.

"Oh!" Dick exclaimed. "Oh, I say! It's that big blue butterfly of the jungles, you've told me about!"

He peered, in ecstasy, at the slowly flying insect, like a jeweled blue star traversing the dark.

"Why does it choose the shadows instead of the sunlight for its home?" Uncle Horace said musingly. "Science can explain much, Dick; but not why that bit of perfect blue wings fearlessly and contentedly through the shades of death."

Sometimes they heard the ringing note of the bell-bird. Frequently a subdued chattering made them look up to see a family of the tiny striped-face spider monkeys peeking down at them from a hole in a tree. The "red howling monkeys" made a terrific din. Concepción shrieked back curses at them. Hunting beasts and reptiles, unseen because of the dense leafage, stirred in the ground cover and through the boughs. A big íguana on a branch gave the cavalcade, filing by, an indifferent glance. Once, as they crossed a marsh on a bridge made of heavy vines and palm, they had a glimpse of rose wings floating on the air; they had startled a flock of flamingoes.

Beyond the marsh the footpath apparently came to an end, as far as Dick could see, though Mendez rode on as if he knew his way. Presently he reined in and dismounted. He called José Perez and told him to look after his horse—the beautiful little white animal, spotted with black, which had so heightened the weird effect of the mounted jaguar in the moonlight the night before. Mendez said to Dick:

"We come now to more open forest and some marshes which we must cross to reach the pampas. This is almost the end of the jungle for us. There

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used to be a path where you see all this underbrush. It makes a short cut. I have to go on foot to clear it with my machete."

"All right. I'll come along on foot, too, and help," Dick answered cheerfully. "José can lead my nag." He tossed the reins to the little man. In a few moments he and Mendez were busily slashing away at the brush together. It was hot work. Mendez dropped his machete, to mop his face. He stuck his big kerchief loosely in the back pocket of his breeches and stooped for his machete. At that moment, Dick, who was brushing the sweat off his brow with his left sleeve, saw one of the long vines beside the trail move, though no wind had blown by to stir it. The men had kept a keen watch for snakes on the march; and, instinctively, Dick knew what it was. He had only his machete, for his rifle was on his saddle. As, with a swift jerk, the false vine's head, with its huge open mouth, came up out of the grass and darted at Mendez's back, Dick sprang forward in one long leap and struck at the anaconda's head with his machete, using all his strength. At the same time he shouted a warning to Mendez.

The snake had seized on the bulging kerchief pocket and missed, by that lucky chance, getting its teeth into Mendez's body. Mendez felt the tug, as Dick shouted, and straightened up quickly, striking blindly with his own weapon. Then he tore loose. The monster serpent fell with a crash to the ground, but not to whirl the crushing coils of its twenty-five foot length around a victim. Dick's quick, well-aimed blow had practically severed its head from its

body. Another slash, and the head lay to one side.

"That was a pretty close shave," Dick panted.

Mendez stared at Dick across the huge mottled rope, which had so nearly twined about him to his death. His extraordinary eyes had an effect of being enlarged, as well as flaming, as he regarded the boy for a moment in silence. Uncle Horace, hastening to the scene, felt his arm touched by Gonsalvo.

"Professor, a man-jaguar is all nonsense, as we scientific men know," Don Felipe whispered. "But look at Ralph's eyes! Have you known another human being whose eyes changed, like his, suddenly in shape and color, the size of the pupils, or became balls of fire? Only the feline tribe, the tiger, leopard, puma, have such eyes."

"I grant you that his look is most natural when peering out of the jaguar's skin," Professor Wynn admitted.

"My! My!" Mendez exclaimed lightly. "Do you see what Dick Wynn did with his little hatchet? Huh? That's no Virginia cherry tree he cut down, like George Washington. Huh? No, Dick Wynn pruned off a bit of honeysuckle vine that nearly strangled a revolution. Ha ha!" he laughed and, leaping over the dead coils of the anaconda, he grasped Dick round the shoulders.

"You had a fortunate escape," said Gonsalvo. He twirled his mustache, with a military air. His little bright eyes darted from side to side. Don Felipe, true Latin-American that he was, was thoroughly enjoying the drama of the situation.

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"So cool, this boy! so cool!" Mendez chuckled. "You know, Professor, the first time I heard this boy's voice in the dark fog in London I liked him. I sniffed when I heard that voice; and I said to myself, 'that boy has a good smell.' Oh my, yes! You laugh, huh? But I tell you the truth. I am a—what-you-call?—a nature-man. I smell people! How do you suppose I could get along in the Orient, with all those strange masks of faces and not knowing, at first, a word they said? Well, I tell you. I *smelled* my way through Turkey! Oh my, yes. I don't say my brains are so good. But a scoundrel has to be a smart fellow to cheat my nose! Come on!"

Their horses were led up by two of the Indian lance bearers. Mendez shouted at them, demanding what had become of Brothers Perez.

"How have you got the horses? I gave them in charge of a Perez."

Then he saw the brothers and, turning Dick's attention to them, began to laugh. The three were coming along now on horseback, single file: and each was supporting a section of the snake's hide. They had lost no time in skinning the anaconda. Doubtless the skin had an odor that meant peril to smaller jungle creatures, because Pio was whimpering and Concepción was screaming with fright.

"What will they do with it?" Dick asked, amused.

"They don't know, yet," Mendez answered, chuckling. "But they take it because they are true bandits. The true bandit takes everything on the chance that some time he may want it. I like Brothers Perez. They are so *thorough*!"

Another hour brought the "army" out upon the *sabana*; a gently rolling plain covered with pampas, and dotted here and there with small palm islands and with depressions where pools from flooding river or tropic rains still lingered.

"Now here again are bad things we have to look out for," said Mendez. "Keep close to the trail I make. Look!"

Dick peered down at a heap of clean-picked bones in a patch of broken grass.

"They look like cattle bones," he said.

"Yes. A jaguar ate a cow there not long ago, and the vultures tidied up after him. The *llaneros* drive cattle across here. Tigers are not all; nor the worst. You see the *matas*?" pointing to several clumps of palm. Lifting their high tops above the pampas, they suggested cool dark green oases from a desert cast upon a brittle, dry, green sea.

"Yes. Do they mean water?"

"Water perhaps. And Indians most likely!"

"Indians? Not bad Indians?"

"The worst. Their home is really the jungle, but they come into the pampas for water and to steal cows. They hide in the *matas* and kill the *llaneros* with their *lanceras*. The war between these savages and our cowboys is merciless."

Juan Perez rode closer in, to point out a spot where he thought there was plenty of water. Both men and horses were thirsty. The air over the pampas was blazing hot. The disappearing of the sun in the west, a burning copper ball in a topaz sky, hardly hinted at cool relief. Dick heard Mendez remind Juan that those men who were from

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the mountains, and unfamiliar with the pampas, must be told again not to ride up to the very brink of the pool; and that they must by no means stoop down to drink, nor let their horses nose into the water. They were to use the cups—really cattle horns—attached to long flexible rods, and carried for this purpose.

"Why do you doubt my cleverness?" Juan asked, proudly. "I know all these things."

Mendez chuckled.

"So you are the wise man, huh?"

"*Si, capitán! un palo de hombre!*"

"What does he mean by that?" Dick asked. "He is always calling himself *un palo de hombre*. When I translate it, the words don't seem to make sense."

"It is a saying among us. You would say, 'A man who stands on his own feet'; or 'A good all-around man.' We say 'A tree of a man.' And Juan is right. He knows that as a rider, shot, bandit, and a soldier in the cause of liberty and much loot, he is entitled to respect. Ah ha." He chuckled.

"Why must we keep away from the water, Ralph?" Dick asked.

"Alligators?" Uncle Horace suggested.

"Alligators also. But chiefly because of the water boa. She is the pampas sister of your deer-swallower, Dick. She will grab you by the nose and pull you down. She lies hidden in the mud waiting for rash North American boys!" He laughed.

"Oh, now, Mendez," Dick protested. "I wasn't so rash with that anaconda. There it was, you see; and I just up with the good old battle-axe and gave

Lady Anaconda a whack on the head. Lucky for you I did. She had you by the pocket."

"What are you talking about?" Mendez retorted with a great show of indignation. "No woman, and no snake, gets Mendez by the pocket! That poor lady was only trying to blow her nose on my silk handkerchief." He showed Dick how to sling his water-horn.

Professor Wynn's field glasses had been in use the entire day. They had revealed to him odd little monkeys, a number of birds and insects, and several beautiful blossoms which were new to him. He had captured one of the jungle's huge blue butterflies, perhaps the rarest of all butterfly specimens in museum collections. He had a marvellous new orchid in his portfolio. He was a supremely happy man. In Gonsalvo he had found an ideal companion. Gonsalvo dabbled a little in the sciences. He also had an enthusiasm for specimens. And he was abundantly gifted with the Latin-American's natural manner toward a guest; which is a happy blending of deference and warm courtesy. These two middle-aged gentlemen had had a wonderful time; and they had quite forgotten that the primary object of Mendez's expedition was the capture, not of butterflies, but of the garrisoned town of Tuctu which lay in a steep valley beyond the pampas. Tuctu was the key to the province of Huaibi. It commanded the great highway connecting the capital of Montalba with the chief *Andino* towns. Mendez's strategy was simple. From this vantage point he could paralyze the communications and the inland commerce of the *Andino* provinces. The

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governor of the fortress was a relative of *El Presidente*, with a worse reputation for cruelty, and for a wholesale graft that might better be called brigandage, than the Illustrious Defender's—if that were possible! He was well supplied with troops. But Mendez knew that there was hardly a civilian now going about his daily affairs in terror who would not leap to horse, six-shooter in hand, and join the revolution once he had entered the town. To capture Tuctu he must take it by surprise. For that reason he had dared the unparalleled feat of making his march through jungle and pampas, knowing that the governor would never apprehend military danger by that route.

Mendez was thinking of his plans; and so he turned rather a blank stare on Gonsalvo and the professor when they joined him. Uncle Horace had just sighted a small alligator to the right and was eager to capture it as a specimen.

"A young alligator," he exclaimed, "less than two yards long. I ought to be able to get him."

Mendez caught his horse's bridle, to prevent him from starting off.

"No, no!" he said. "You leave that small fellow alone. He is no juvenile. He may be as old as you are. That is the one we call the *baba*. He never grows any bigger. But, when we see him, we ride in another direction. He goes straight for the horse. One blow of his strong tail, or his jaws, breaks your horse's legs. And that is your finish, too: because you cannot foot it over the pampas. You're dead, if you lose your horse!"

"Well, perhaps you're wise." Uncle Horace

was plainly disappointed. "I shouldn't complain, for I have a blue butterfly. And doubtless, to-morrow, I shall find other interesting specimens."

A sardonic smile brought Mendez's strong white teeth into evidence, and he startled Uncle Horace out of his peaceful scientific dream with one of those sudden ruthless phrases of which he was capable.

"To-morrow? Oh, yes, you will find some interesting specimens in Tuctu. In particular, Eulogio Ruiz, the governor. Like the other specimens in your portfolio, he is more valuable to humanity dead than alive."

"Dead—dead governor?" Uncle Horace gasped.

"Oh my, yes. To-day, you killed butterflies. To-morrow, you will kill men."

CHAPTER VIII

BETRAYAL AND VENGEANCE

SINCE entering the pampas Mendez had been expecting the arrival of a scout from one of his lieutenants, who was organizing a band of men to join him at the farthest *mata* now looming dimly on the horizon. So far there were no signs of him.

Dick was wondering why Mendez kept his own field glasses turned on the sky above that far distant clump of trees. Presently his curiosity got the better of him.

"Is the scout coming by airplane?" he asked.

"No."

"Then why are you studying the sky?" Dick persisted. "You've been looking at it for the last hour."

"Because the sky is like a mirror—a magical mirror. It reflects secret things. I am reading there something now."

"Reading what, Ralph?" Dick had fallen into the way of using Mendez's first name as he had heard it from Gonsalvo. Being as much an English as a Spanish name, "Ralph" seemed to bring him and his friend closer together.

"I do not yet know. It is a little too soon to interpret. Look," he handed the glasses to Dick. "Tell me what you see."

Dick adjusted the glasses and turned them on the same patch of sky.

"Why, it's only a flock of birds," he said. "I guess they are pretty big birds, though. They keep going round and round above that one patch of woods."

"Yes." Mendez took back the glasses and lifted them to his own eyes again. "They are vultures. They are hanging there because there is food for them in that *mata*. They do not descend for it; you know why? Because something else is at present guarding, or eating, that food."

"Maybe a jaguar, eh?"

"Maybe; yes. But a jaguar eats steadily and ravenously until he can hold no more; then he crawls off into the grass to sleep. Perhaps he goes first to a water-hole. But he does not sleep beside his kill. As soon as he has gone, the vultures swoop down. Those vultures have been in the air ever since we came into the pampas."

"You think it is *not* a jaguar, Ralph? What do you think it is?"

Before Mendez could answer, Little Perez rushed up to say that two riders were approaching. The two men dashed into the group a few moments later. They were the scouts for whom Mendez had been waiting. They spoke so rapidly that Dick could not grasp all they said: but, from their answers to a question which Mendez twice repeated, he understood that the lieutenant, a man named Ulloa, could not meet them at the *mata* but would wait for them in the vicinity of Tuctu.

"That is all right. Return now to Ulloa and tell

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him that I understand. You are brave fellows and you have done well to come to me safely with this message," Mendez said.

"*Gracias; gracias, capitán.*"

"You want to be careful in passing the *mata*," Mendez went on, casually. "It will be dark when you reach it. I noticed some vultures. That means a jaguar is eating a cow in there. Beware of *El Tigre*." He smiled affably as he spoke, dismissing them with a gesture. They raced away and were soon lost to view in the dusk and the high grass of the rolling plain. Something in Mendez's expression arrested Dick's attention and sent a chill through him.

"Ralph, *what* is in that *mata*?" he demanded. "You told them a jaguar. *But you don't think so!*"

Mendez's face had its repellent iron look: his eyes were black and lusterless.

"Another beast is there," he answered. "Call it treachery."

"Treachery?" Dick gasped.

"Yes. It is a lie, this message of Ulloa's. Men are camped in the *mata*. That is why the vultures still hang in the air. Because the men have game, or cattle, there which they have killed and will cook for their supper. Did I not say the sky was a magic mirror, reflecting even the hearts of men?" He smiled cynically. "Ulloa has sold out to Ruiz. *It is an ambush!*"

He wheeled abruptly and went quickly among his men, explaining the situation to them. The news was greeted with a pandemonium of curses and snarls of rage. Uncle Horace and Don Felipe, who

had been poring over the portfolio during the interview with the scouts, sought out Dick to learn what had happened. Gonsalvo carried the portfolio under his arm.

"What are these wild beasts of Ralph's growling about now?" Gonsalvo wanted to know. "It is incredible! Some trifling thing happens, and they are at once screaming! No control! Savages! Animals!"

Dick hastily told them the story, not omitting the part played by the vultures and Mendez's field glasses.

"An ambush? Well," Professor Wynn turned to Gonsalvo, "these men are, as you say, undisciplined: so there is perhaps some excuse—" He stopped short.

Don Felipe's face first flushed crimson and then as swiftly went gray. His little brown eyes burned with the intensity of sparks. There was a baleful glare in them, as he blinked hard at Uncle Horace and then sprang upon his horse. His lips curved in a snarl:

"*Idiot of a cold blood!*" he hissed at his dear comrade of a perfect day, his brother in science; and hurled the portfolio of botanical specimens straight at the professor's head "Gods of Darwin! May I become a red howling monkey after death, but never a *Norte-Americano!* *Cold storage one!* Bah!" He stood up in his stirrups and shook his fist above his head in the direction of the *mata*, now hidden by the dark. His voice alternately snarling and shrieking, he dedicated himself to the patriotic duty of cutting out Ulloa's heart and feeding it

piecemeal to Concepción. Dick, convulsed with laughter, busied himself in picking up the portfolio and returning it to his uncle, whose head it had missed by a few inches.

"Dear me," said Uncle Horace, "who would have expected Señor Gonsalvo to—er—to let go, as it were? For the moment I am almost compelled to query whether there may not be something in the popular belief about racial temperaments? Though science cannot truly be said to support it." He shook his head resolutely, with the manner of a tempted soul shaking off a heresy.

After a hasty supper they started on in the dark.

"I go ahead," Mendez said to Dick, "because I can see in the dark. You follow me; but not too close, for I may ride over a crocodile or a sleeping tiger, or into a boa's mud bed. We are going to try to pass the *mata* so far to the left that those fellows will not see nor hear us. We must do it before the moon is up. Do you think a revolution is something serious, Dick Wynn?" He jerked the question out so that Dick almost started.

"Yes, Ralph, I do," he answered, wondering what was in Mendez's mind now.

"You are mistaken, Dick Wynn. It is a joke. For to-night, the only chance of freedom for my country depends on Mendez's cat's eyes!"

They proceeded at a trot endless black miles, or so it seemed to Dick. A wind blew in their faces. Stars flashed high above them and, by their reflection, gave warning of the pools. The moon was just rising when Mendez called a halt. Dick saw the outline of the *mata* on their right, a scant half-mile

behind them. Mendez held a whispered consultation with Brothers Perez and Gonsalvo. Then the band moved out, in a semicircle, to surround the *mata* on three sides. Some of the Indians slashed pampas and twisted it into bundles. Dick felt Mendez's hand on his shoulder.

"You will see an ugly thing to-night, Dick Wynn. I am sorry you are here. Why did you not take my advice in London, and stay away from Montalba and *El Tigre*?" His voice was gentle and regretful.

"What's going to happen?" Dick asked.

"Not a man in there must be allowed to escape alive, to tell them at Tuctu that I have passed. Governor Ruiz will get no news of his ambush until I arrive, myself, to give it to him. The bunches of dry grass will be used to start a fire around this end of the *mata*. The wind will do the rest. Miles of pampas will burn. The men, who run in any direction but this, will be caught up with presently by the fire. Those, who run in this direction, will meet bullets and machetes. It is extermination. I wish you had stayed in London, Señor Boy."

London sounded pale and tame to Dick at that moment.

"I don't. I like fire better than fog," he said, emphatically. They waited. The *mata* was about a half-mile long; and Ruiz's men were gathered in the far end of it, watching for Mendez. They had not even posted a sentinel in the other end; they were sure that Mendez had no suspicion of their plans—not guessing that he had read a forecast of them, as etched by vultures' wings on the clear heavens. So silently and adroitly did Mendez's

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crafty *Indios* and *llaneros* do their work, that their presence was not disclosed until the fire leaped high and fastened on the palms. A few moments more, and the flames sped by, roaring through the high dry grass on each side of the ambush.

With screams of terror, the concealed foe rushed out at the other end of the *mata*. Then, seeing their full peril there, they dashed right and left in the effort to head around the flames in the grass and reach safety back of the place where the fire had started. But both right and left a fusillade stopped them.

"Catch for me one man alive," Mendez ordered. Presently some of his Indians brought him one. The wretched creature answered questions volubly in the forlorn hope of saving his life.

"No," he said, "Ulloa is not here. Ruiz trusts no one. He kept Ulloa in the fortress till the soldiers return. They had orders not to kill you, but to bring you a prisoner. Ulloa told Ruiz you are *El Tigre*. Then Ruiz sent this word to *El Presidente*. And *El Presidente* came himself to Tuctu. He is there now. For days he sent out hunters to trap a jaguar. They caught one at last. He is very big and fierce. He has already killed a man. *El Presidente* said that, when you were brought prisoner there, you should put on your jaguar skin and go into a room where that jaguar is. He had a cage built so that he could watch *El Tigre* wrestle with the jaguar for his life. But, if Ulloa lies and you are not *El Tigre*, then Ulloa will be given to the jaguar."

Mendez, beckoning Dick, rode away without

answering. Their backs were scarcely turned before the Indians hacked the man down.

"Catch all the horses you can," Mendez shouted. "Don't let a horse burn to death! If you can't save it, shoot it!"

Across the crackle of flames, the snapping of rifles, and the curses of merciless men trapped in a horrible death by men not more merciless, only more crafty, came other sounds—the cries of wild animals wakened from their sleep in the grass by the hot flame spreading and tearing in fan-shape through the pampas. A tiger screamed. Mendez and Dick, looking that way, saw him spring, his tawny and black body outlined an instant against the glare. Then he came on in a direct line for the place where Mendez and his small group were reined in. Fleeing from one enemy, fire, he saw another, man; and he opened his huge mouth in a growl of defiance and fury. Several guns were lifted, but Mendez shouted:

"Don't shoot!"

The jaguar bounded forward; then he veered to one side, and passed in a high leap, snarling a last fierce challenge as he went by not a dozen paces from Mendez's horse, which reared and almost overbalanced in its terror.

"His eyes! How he lifted his head and scorned us! So magnificent! So proud!" Mendez exclaimed, with admiration. "Let him live!"

"What an extraordinary man!" Uncle Horace murmured. Thereafter the Indians spoke of that jaguar, which had reasoned, like a man, the best way to get out of the flames and then had dared

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men in the effort, as the "Little Brother of *El Tigre*."

"Not one of the enemy has got past us?" Mendez demanded of Brothers Perez and Gonsalvo, who rejoined him now with their band.

"Not one!" Gonsalvo shouted.

"That would be impossible, *capitán*," said Juan Perez, speaking with dignity. "We have lost only the snake skin; but we have gained many horses. Though they fired some shots, and a few of our men have wounds, I am unhurt. So is Pio. So is Concepción. It is Juan Perez who tells you these things—a tree of a man, *capitán*!"

"I am eager to see that tiger reserved for me by *El Presidente*," Mendez said, with a silkiness in his voice that gave Dick a little chill at his hair roots. The boy was suddenly conscious of an almost overmastering fatigue. How many hours had he ridden, he wondered dimly? Since dawn! And the ghastly terribleness of this business to-night. . . . He felt a clasp like iron about him. His bridle was taken out of hand. . . . He was being held on somehow, limp as he was. . . . From a long way off, it seemed, he heard Mendez's harsh voice . . . like a rasping blast from an iron horn:

"March!"

CHAPTER IX

FOR THE LITTLE DON DIEGO

SOME time during the night, Dick felt himself lifted and carried and then laid down somewhere. He was vaguely aware of torch glare, voices, the jingle of harness, the pawing of hoofs, and knew, in a sense, that the cavalcade had come to a pause; but he slipped out of the conscious scene again immediately, drenched with sleep.

Mendez and his men had emerged from the last fringe of the pampas upon a small ranch. It seemed a good place to camp, feed, and take a brief sleep. The old woman who opened the door, peering out with anguished, terror-stricken face, admitted that she was alone; she had a son, however, who was "away."

"Don't be so scared," Mendez said. "Get us some food, anything you have. Here is money to pay for it."

"You pay?" she exclaimed, staring unbelievably at the coins he had tossed on the table. "Then who are you? For you cannot be government men!"

"Oh ho!" Mendez chuckled. "You know already that government men don't pay, huh?"

"*Si, señor.*" The tears came to her eyes. "Only last night government men were here, and they killed my cow to roast for food."

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"There now, no tears. You will earn enough to-night to buy another cow."

"Is it possible?" She came closer and looked intently at him. "Señor, since you are not of the government, are you, perhaps, of the revolution?"

"Si," he answered shortly.

"Then, since the señor is of the revolution, he has perhaps seen our Don Diego de Mendez?" eagerly.

"Yes. I know him well."

"Ah!" she beamed at him. "How I wish I could see him now—a man grown, and with a great name in the world! I was just married, and my son not born yet, when the old Don Diego came by one day; and he had the little son with him. Know, señor, that all this ranch, and many miles about, belonged to that family. We paid rent to old Don Diego. Ah! So kind, so good! Then he died, and we never saw the little son again; for he was far away. But a friend of Don Diego's came to get the rent for him. Then we heard, at last, that the little Don Diego, who had become a very great man, had returned to make revolution against *El Presidente*. And, last night, government men came and killed the cow and said they were going to capture the little son, our Don Diego who has come home to save us. And I sent my son away, to ride like mad and find our little Don Diego to warn him. But I do not know if he could recognize him in the dark; for, indeed, he was not born yet when the little Don Diego came here only that once." Her tears began to flow again.

"Harumph!" Gonsalvo cleared his throat. His

eyes were wet. "What a heritage you have in your name, Ralph!" he said. "From generation to generation, a name honored and beloved!"

"She risked a cruel death for herself and her son," said Professor Wynn. "If Ruiz's men had suspected that she was trying to aid you!"

"She is a Montalban," Mendez said gruffly. "We do incredible things from hate. We will sacrifice everything for a love, an ideal, something that is beautiful to us—as is this old woman's memory of one day when my father brought me here. I must have been very small, for I do not remember it." He extended his hand to the woman. She put hers in it hesitantly. "I am he, that little Don Diego," he said gently.

"It is true," came in the stentorian tones of Gonsalvo. "Old woman, you have the honor to kiss the hand of General de Mendez." Don Felipe was not to be left out of any scene.

With cries of joy, the old woman covered Mendez's hand with kisses.

"Now, now; that's enough!" he said, huskily. "Run to your kitchen. Juan Perez, go, the three of you, and help her. And with respect; for, to your *capitán*, this is a noble lady. You trees of men should have some nests in your branches; so shake down plenty of eggs into the frying pan! March!" He put his hand on Gonsalvo's shoulder. "You see what would have happened, Felipe, had I made peace with the tyrant, as you and others counselled me. I would have betrayed the faith of many; simple hearts, who have believed that, because I

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bear the name of those who, from Bolivar's time till now, always put duty and patriotism first, and were never bought and sold, I would come one day and draw the sword for them."

He wheeled away abruptly and stepped outside.

"Inside, Ralph is all heart," Don Felipe informed Professor Wynn. He twirled his mustache. His very bright little eyes rolled ceilingward. "But he has a terror some one will find that out! So he puts on, sometimes, the manners of violence; which utterly belie his character. Now, as to myself, I have none of the little deceptions, no roughness, no fierceness, put on to hide my heart. My nature is simpler, wholly sentimental, very pacific. So I am always as you see me now."

Professor Wynn, who had not been noticed by Gonsalvo since the moment, so long back, when that wholly sentimental and utterly pacific gentleman threw the portfolio at his head, stared helplessly; and then stuttered a vague remark which might be taken as a sympathetic answer.

"I wish I could have had our State Department down here with me during the last twenty-four hours," he thought. "They would have gained more understanding of Latin-America than half a century of diplomatic correspondence has given them. They wouldn't try to compel, a people of this caliber."

The return of the woman's son, Pedro, caused a disturbance, because Mendez's sentinels took him for a spy from Tuctu: and the noise woke Dick. He came out of his heavy nap, fresh and hungry, and ready for anything in the way of adventure which

might offer. While he was devouring eggs and rice and coffee, he listened to *El Tigre's* talk with Pedro.

According to Pedro, there was a hay farm a half day's journey beyond. It belonged to the governor. There the garrison's extra mounts were pastured. And, every so often, Pedro himself went to help cut hay, and to drive wagons laden with it to the fortress at Tuctu. Yes; they knew him well at the farm and at the fort also, for a faithful fellow who could work hard and yet make no complaint when his wages were not paid. He would be going there again in two or three days to drive the hay wagons to Tuctu. The *capitán* wished to know how the wagons were loaded, and how they were driven?

Sometimes he took friends of his to help and sometimes the young men at the farm helped. This time he must take friends; because those young men of the farm had gone into the pampas with Ruiz's soldiers, and perhaps they would not return in time.

Mendez did not inform him of what had happened to Ruiz's men. He struck the palm of his hand on the table. His eyes sparkled.

"Tiger's luck again! Ah ha!" he laughed. "Do you guess what we are going to do, Dick Wynn—you, with your mouth full of eggs? No? Huh?"

"Yes, I do," Dick retorted, excitedly. "We're going haying! It's back to the farm for us!"

Mendez slapped him on the back vigorously.

"You caught it quick, that idea! I like that. Yes, Dick Wynn. I send my *palo de hombre* with his brothers to help Pedro at the farm and to drive the wagons." He paused to ask Pedro several questions

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about the road from the farm to Tuctu. There was, it appeared, a steep bit of forest above a cañon. He made Pedro describe the locality minutely.

"Good! That is where we will hide till you and your hay come along. You and Brothers Perez start as soon as it is light. You say there is now only the old man at the farm since the sons went with Ruiz's men? All right. We can't go past without being seen. But we will go at a racing gallop; and you will say we are Ruiz's men on our way back from the pampas. You will tell them you left Ruiz's men sleeping here when you started for the farm. Half a dozen of my men will be tied on their horses, with their hands bound behind their backs, to look like prisoners. You will point that out. It is a precaution I take, also, because we may meet persons on the road. If that is a government farm, it has a telephone: for *El Presidente* is mad on the subject of telephones. He builds houses he does not want for no other reason than to install telephones and radios." He laughed.

"*Si, capitán,*" Pedro nodded solemnly. "There is that thing called a telephone. Miguel, the farmer, *capitán*, though he is only a poor and ignorant man, can speak to the commandant at Tuctu, by only saying words to a tin box on the wall. It is very mysterious. He will certainly speak to the box when he has seen you ride past. He has orders to tell everything to that box. Whatever Miguel tells to *his* box, the commandant's box in Tuctu tells to the commandant! *Capitán*, you are the little Don Diego beloved of my mother; and I would not lie to you," earnestly.

"No, no, good Pedro. I, too, have seen these boxes. I know you speak the truth. Come, then. Be on your way! Huh?"

"*Si, capitán.*" His dull gentle eyes brightened for a moment, as he added fervently, "*Por la libertad!*"

"For liberty," Dick translated, thoughtfully.

"Yes." Mendez, who had risen to shake Pedro's hand and to follow him to the door with a last whispered order, came back and put his hand heavily on Dick's shoulder. "Dick Wynn, when you came on a pleasure trip to Montalba, you did not expect to be soon fighting for the liberty of a country that is not yours, and for a people alien to you in blood, speech, and inherited traditions. It is an unfair thing that has happened to you. But what can I do? Dangerous as it is for you to be with me, I know of no safe place to leave you."

"That's all true enough, Ralph," Dick answered. "But I guess I've got the same ideas as Dad about that. You see, we think that liberty is a principle, and that a democratic government, like Uncle Sam's, is the only kind that gives a man a square chance to be a man. And, being a real, 'true-blue, all-wool-and-a-yard-wide and hundred-per-cent' "—he grinned—"American means being ready to stand up for these things any *where*, any *time*! Sure, I wasn't expecting to make my own first stand for them in Montalba. But all I can say is, the time and the place suit me fine!"

"And quite right, too, Dick," said Uncle Horace approvingly.

"Holy Smoking Moses!" Mendez cried out

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jubilantly. "This boy smells even better here than in the fog!"

"Sure!" Dick giggled. "Juan cooked lots of garlic with the eggs!"

The three Perez brothers leaned against the wall, waiting for Pedro who was taking a last leave of his mother. Professor Wynn heard them bemoaning the loss of the anaconda's skin.

"What were you going to do with it?" he asked, thinking he might learn a new and instructive fact about the native uses of snake skin.

"Señor, we never knew," Juan answered plaintively. "Señor, Brothers Perez lost it before we found out."

"Many things like that happen to men on the pampas, señor," said José. "On the pampas, señor, a man does not know if he will cross to the other side *with his own skin!* Therefore, how shall he know about a snake's?"

"Yet we did so," Little Perez added. "Nevertheless, señor, the loss of the other was a misfortune."

Dick called over his shoulder to ask after the health of Pio and Concepción. He had noticed that Juan was wearing a new sombrero, one gathered from the enemy, and that the hat slashed for the convenience of his pets was nowhere in sight. Juan explained that he had left the hat and the marmoset and the macaw with Pedro's mother in the kitchen; because the attack on Tuctu, a fortress and town, meant new and surprising things with which he was unfamiliar. On the pampas, or in the mountains, he could guarantee to take care of his *amigos*. But,

in a street inside a town—well, he couldn't say. People, who were crowded in towns, were most likely given to stealing pets. Also, if he were killed, they might be trampled to death. If all went well with him, he could return, later, to the ranch and recover these two dear friends. Unfortunately, Concepción would undoubtedly refuse to take food from the old *señora*; because she suffered none but her *amigo*, Juan Perez, to feed her. But in time, hunger would compel her to eat what the old woman offered. The thing that chiefly troubled him now was the rough language Concepción would use torrentially upon the mother of Pedro. This would be unbecoming; because, to his *capitán*, the old woman was a "noble lady." However, it appeared, Juan had done his best to nullify this offence.

"'Señora' (thus I said to her), 'señora, you are old. It happens often, by nature, that the aged are deaf. Believe it of yourself, señora.' Thus I said, Don Dick, with tears for my Pio and my Concepción. Señor, I am a man like that!'"

CHAPTER X

EL TIGRE ENTERS TUCTU

MEN and horses rested half the day, and then set out toward Tuctu.

As usual, Mendez rode ahead with Dick close by; at his side this time, for they were traveling along a good wide trail. Directly behind him came a group of *llaneros*, who apparently had six prisoners in charge. And, following them, were Colonel Gonzalvo and Professor Wynn. The Indians brought up the rear, leading the captured horses, each of which carried on its empty saddle some part of its slain master's clothing and equipment—a poncho, a pair of trousers, a rifle, knife, machete, a sombrero. Only a close examination would have shown that two blond North Americans rode in the party. Dick and Professor Wynn were garbed now in ponchos and wore the high brown velvet sombreros of dead Montalbans who had sought to serve Ruiz. There had been a wide choice of raiment and mounts; for, at the *mata*, Brothers Perez had been what Mendez called "thorough." It was the tree of a man, himself, who had caught most of the horses.

Just before dusk the cavalcade passed the farm at a dash. The hay wagons, laden high, drawn by mules, and driven by Pedro and Brothers Perez, were slowly moving out upon the road. Mendez

waited for them at the rendezvous over the cañon, some fifteen miles from the bridge which led directly into the fortress, at the north end of the town.

Here Mendez and sixteen of his men, including Dick and Brothers Perez, crawled in under the hay. The wagons were tied together firmly and all the mules were harnessed to the lead wagon. Save for an Indian in sombrero and poncho, seated beside him, Pedro, the driver, was apparently alone. They set off with all the speed they could make. Gonsalvo, put in command of the rest of the troops, had his orders to follow with all the horses and the fake prisoners. He was to separate his men at the bridge; stationing half at the far end, and half at the town end just outside the fort. They were to wait action until they knew whether the coup Mendez planned had been successful. A signal would warn them. In case of its failure, they were to rush the gates and fight to the finish.

Dick's heart thumped and his pulses raced, as the front wagon stopped. They were at the fort's gate! He heard Pedro knocking, then the grating of hinges, then a colloquy which drew nearer to the wagon.

"*Si, coronel,*" Pedro was saying when Dick could make out the words. The sentry was not a colonel but Pedro knew the worth of flattery. "It is the hay, *coronel*, which I will now put in the stables. But, *coronel*, I bring news. At first, it is for your ears alone, and then only for the commandant's. The soldiers are at the bridge with some prisoners—*si!*—just across the river, *coronel*. But they know

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not if they have him who is called *El Tigre*. You understand, *coronel*, that if they have not *El Tigre* it would be better they had no one at all; for the governor wanted only *El Tigre*. Therefore they have told me to whisper, first to you, *coronel*, and then to the commandant, that the prisoner, Ulloa, should be brought very secretly across the bridge to see these six men, who are tied on the horses with their hands bound, also their feet. If he can tell you that one—a very fierce man, they say, who could scarcely be captured—is *El Tigre*, then the commandant himself shall lead *El Tigre* before the governor. It is better always not to anger the governor. If he is not *El Tigre*, then Ulloa only is to blame. If the governor becomes angry and strikes with his sword, as is his custom, it will be Ulloa's throat he will pierce; and not the entirely well-meaning throat of the honest captain out there, which has already suffered many dangers. They told me to tell it you, *coronel*, in this manner. I have done so."

"Very good. You are a discreet man. Take your wagons into the stable yard, which is your business. These more serious matters are for the military; though, after your fashion, you have done well." The sentry spoke pompously, as he thought a *coronel* should.

Dick felt the wagon in motion again. They were inside the yard of the fortress! He heard low excited voices. The commandant and several men went by. Evidently they had Ulloa with them; for a man protested his truthfulness in nerve-racked tones.

"Now!" Pedro muttered into the hay.

Mendez dived out, and Dick followed him.

"The stable men ran to the gate to see the prisoners," Pedro explained.

The men were all out on their feet now, crouched in the dark of the courtyard and the shadow of the wagons. The sentry, drawn by curiosity, and dimly descrying horsemen close by, stepped from his post and went down the twenty yards or so to them, to ask questions. And there, instantly, he died in the midst of them from a knife thrust in the back. His body was lifted and tossed into the ditch at the other side of the road. The horsemen drew up nearer to the open gate.

Mendez and his men inside had gradually shifted through the shadows till they commanded the entrance to the governor's stone mansion. The house and the fortress cut off the sky from the narrow street, and made a well of inky blackness. Upstairs, revelry was in progress. The music of stringed instruments, husky or raucous snatches of song, the clinking of glasses, raised voices, laughter, came through the open windows. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers.

"What did you say?" Dick whispered, hearing a murmur from Mendez.

"How perfect the night! 'Roses, dew-laden, perfuming the shadows; and the nightingale's song, like a vanquished sorrow'—" he quoted, in his own translation. "Such moments make life seem real to me, and not just a bad joke."

Dick, trembling, his ears strained for sounds from the bridge, at first doubted his hearing! Then he

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concluded that, as an Anglo-Saxon boy from the United States, he might as well give up, right there and then, any idea of ever being able to understand this man he loved—the Spanish-Indian *Tigre*, who made life seem real to him by quoting poetry about the beauty of roses while he stood waiting to kill!

“Your gun is ready? You are not afraid?” Mendez’s hand was on his arm.

“I don’t think I’m afraid. I think it’s excitement, shaking me,” Dick answered.

“Because of the waiting. With action comes steadiness.”

Crack! Crack! Crack! The rifles began their work on the bridge. Soldiers poured pell-mell out of the fortress and started for the gate, to learn the meaning of the shots. In the yard they encountered the mounted men whom Gonsalvo had stationed at that end of the bridge. These men had their machetes ready; for their orders were to begin their work as silently as possible. Never guessing who they were, an officer rushed up to the nearest, crying:

“What is is, comrade?”

“It is the revolution,” the man answered softly; and cut the officer down. Now came the sound of hoofs racing over the bridge; and Gonsalvo, with Uncle Horace not far behind, brought his men in at a gallop. The time for quiet work was past. Firearms began to speak.

Upstairs the sounds of revelry had ceased. Heads appeared at the windows. Shouts demanded to know what was going on.

“*El Tigre* is here!” Mendez cried in answer.

Raising his voice, he called to his Indians, who had remained in the rear. "*Indios! Lanceras!*" Then he shouted up once more at the windows, "Ruiz! *Presidente!* I am Mendez; and I have brought you a tiger!"

As a shower of the long arrows swished through the windows like a gust of rain, Mendez dashed up the steps into the house, with Dick and the Perez brothers hot on his heels, and Pedro and the rest of the hay-makers following.

"There are other stairs, other doors! Guard them!" he cried.

Mendez, himself, stooping and keeping under partial cover of the wide banister, leaped on, as if on velvet paws, up the main stairway. "Do what you see me do," he told Dick. His six-shooter was in one hand, his machete in the other. Shots were spitting about them already from the balcony. The men, who had been taken by surprise up there, were not cowards; but, seeing the impossibility of fighting their way down the main staircase, they dashed for the other. Over dead and dying, Mendez plunged on toward the banquet hall. He called a warning about the *lanceras*.

Arrows were still hissing into the brilliantly lighted, richly furnished room. Their long shafts made a willowlike fringe on the wall opposite the line of windows. They lay among the glass and porcelain they had shattered; and they seemed to grow, like slanting reeds, out of the floor among a hundred crimson roses spilled from a huge crystal vase, which had been overturned and smashed.

Dick noticed these details mechanically; even as

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he noticed a stout woman, in a servant's dress with a kerchief over her head, slip through a small door in the arrow-notched wall. He saw them and tried to realize them, unconsciously, as a relief from a sight—and from sounds—more terrible. The sounds of a powerful beast in pain came from a high iron cage in the center of the room. The jaguar, which had been captured to maul *El Tigre* for the sport of the president, was in it, chained, his head dragged so far back by the iron that he could not reach, with his jaws, to the shaft of an arrow that pinned one paw to the ground. With the other, in his agony and rage, he struck through the bars, again and again, at a head which had fallen within reach of his claws. Governor Ruiz lay there, among the roses, nailed to the floor by a *lancera* through his throat.

"What cruelty!" Mendez cried, his eyes flaming. "He never killed in his life except for food!" Recklessly risking the still falling arrows, he leaped to the side of the cage and, bracing himself against it, pulled at the shaft with all his strength. It came free at last, tearing a three-cornered wound with its heavy point.

"Ralph! Look out!" Dick yelled, as the jaguar tried desperately to glut its fury on this new torturer.

"Leave him alone! Maybe I have to shoot him, later. But now there is other work." Mendez swung the *lancera* against the hanging damask of the cloth, brushing it aside so that he could look beneath the table. The next moment, he had made another dangerous dash and had dragged out the body of a serving woman. Her dress and sandals were gone.

She, too, had died from a wound in the throat; a knife wound.

"Who is it?" Dick cried; for the look on Mendez's face terrified him. Mendez did not answer. He stood still in the middle of the room, oblivious of falling arrows, his skin darkening as great veins swelled on his forehead and hands. His eyes, wide, dull and tortured, told of a moral struggle almost beyond his power to make against an engulfing fury. Two Perez brothers dived at him and dragged him out of danger.

"*Gracias*," he muttered, looking at them unseeingly. In another moment he was himself again. He leaped to the back of the cage and, with his machete, severed the short heavy chain which dragged the poor beast's head back. "The cage is enough to hold him," he said: "Come on! And fasten those doors. Pedro, tell my *Indios* to stop shooting in here. You, Brothers Perez, search the house."

He turned down the stairs. Gonsalvo and Uncle Horace were coming up.

"Our victory is complete!" Don Felipe caressed his mustache. "The citizens are about to gather below. Ulloa did not last long. The commandant shot him, himself. The two of them lie, together, somewhere on the rocks of the cañon below the bridge. May the vultures give them an appropriate burial! Did you kill or capture *El Presidente* and Ruiz?"

"Ruiz is dead. *El Presidente* has not yet been found. Let us go outside. I am sick," Mendez replied gruffly. He tore down the stairs and out into

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the night air. Dick found him leaning his face against a cluster of dewy roses.

"What's the matter, Ralph?" Dick said. "Something's gone wrong?"

"Yes—no—I don't know. But the thing that is the matter is that I, too, am a wild beast. For one moment up there, I wished to have my hands on *El Presidente* that I might see him torn to death by the jaguar—or by Brothers Perez or any one of these wild men of mine. He killed that woman to get her dress and shoes. That was he who slipped away as we entered! He could have taken her dress. No doubt she would have given it to him; she has served his cousin and that family all her life. But no! He fears she may talk, perhaps. He cuts her throat. Bah! And I do not dare tell even Gonsalvo; for he would never rest till my men had captured *El Presidente*. Once they got him—! No, no! I cannot permit atrocities. Liberty must not be made foul in such fashion!"

A wild shout from the men in the courtyard made Dick look up where they pointed. The jaguar, free of its crippling iron, had found the weak spot in its cage. Perhaps Mendez hacked through a bar in cutting the chain; or, not unlikely, the jaguar's strength had been enough to wreck his prison. He had followed the smell of fresh air to the window. For a moment or two he looked out uncertainly at the shouting crowd, the torches and horses, and at the sky and the dark wall that stood above the square. Then he leaped. His beautiful body showed an instant against the sky. He bounded upon the wall and, in another leap, was gone. Below

was the bank, a long steep dip to the river, where there was cooling ease for his lacerated and burning paw.

On that bank, creeping, listening, lying still in the shadows and then crawling on again, and silently cursing the dawn-white of the sky, the one-time Illustrious Defender of Montalba, in the dress of a serving woman, sought for hiding and safety. He, too, must reach the river. There was a small boat there. He crept on.

"Why didn't you shoot him?" Several of the men upbraided the Indians, who had not shot an arrow when the jaguar made his leap.

"No, no!" they said. "Shoot *him*? Is he not the Little Brother of *El Tigre*?" They thought it was the same jaguar which had leaped out of the flames, and which Mendez had ordered them to let live. He had come here to give *Mendez-El Tigre* good luck!

Several hours later, Dick was looking over the river valley from the tower of the fortress. Below, on the bridge, a man rode rapidly. It was Juan Perez, *un palo de hombre*, making all haste back to Pedro's ranch to fetch his Pio and his Concepción and their favorite hat. With the field glasses, Dick could see a bag hanging from the saddle; but he could not see that, within it, among other small loot picked up in the military search of the governor's mansion, were the contents of a nut bowl and of a sugar bowl that had figured in the feast. To feed his pets from the vanished president's last banquet satisfied something royal in the soul of Juan Perez. Señores, he was a man like that!

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Looking up at a marvellous burning blue sky without a cloud, Dick saw black specks against the sun. They floated nearer and became black wings, growing larger, sailing lower, on the blue. In stately order they came, seemingly out of nowhere, till they were over the bank beyond the bridge. Then, wheeling, they dropped.

"Beautiful, ruthless, self-sacrificing, spectacular yet sincere — magnificently incomprehensible—" Uncle Horace muttered.

"What is so contradictory, Professor?" Mendez asked. He had joined them at that moment. He put his arm around Dick's shoulder.

"Your country and your nation; and, I frankly say it, in all friendship, yourself also, General de Mendez."

Mendez was silent for a moment. Presently he said:

"I was trying to think of a poem I read once. But now I can remember only one line. That line says it all for me." His eyes kindled with feeling and his voice was not clear nor steady as he quoted it, "'These are my people, and this my land.' I am a Montalban."

Dick drew a long sigh of contentment.

"Gee!" he said, "Ralph, I sure am glad I horned in on that dinner they gave you in London!"

CHAPTER XI

A LULL BETWEEN STORMS

"WHAT are you going to do about the Illustrious Defender?" Dick asked, when he and Mendez found themselves alone. "He has an army in Amarilla, hasn't he? Suppose he gets in touch with it and brings it here against you?"

Mendez shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a possibility. I have sent some of my Indians out to look for a man in woman's dress, with orders to bring him to me. If he is caught, I will put him in the prison here and charge some of the gentlemen of the town with his safety. If he has really escaped—well, Dick—he may make us some trouble yet. I do not underrate that old man. He is no coward, if he is cornered; he has a will of iron, no scruples. He will fight if he must. I only hope, however, he decides to escape to Europe and that he reaches his ship in safety. He has always a war vessel waiting in the harbor, to carry him away if there is a revolution which really threatens him. I think it would be much better for Montalba if he—what-you-call—scooted. Huh?"

"Scooted is old," Dick replied, grinning. "Nowadays, we say 'faded.' Or 'did a fade-away.' I see I'll have to bring your slang up to date."

"Holy Smoking Moses! Who can keep the pace

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with American slang? But I like it. It is always clever. Especially cowboys' slang and miners' slang. When I was in Nevada in the gold rush, I learned some of these clever phrases. And in Texas and Arizona, when I was a cowboy rustling cattle."

"Ralph, a cattle rustler is a man who rounds up unbranded heifers belonging to other people and—"

"Now, imagine your instructing me in this matter!" Mendez interrupted with an air of stern dignity. "Sometimes I was on the Mexican side of the border with cows from Texas; and sometimes I was on the Arizona side with Mexican cows. And if it wasn't rustling, then to tell you the honest truth I wouldn't know what to call it!" He chuckled shamelessly. "Those were my wild, free, and happy days, when I knew no law but the speed of my horse. They are gone forever."

"But think of the great days ahead of you!" Dick exclaimed.

"Huh!" Mendez grunted. "Do you want to know what I see ahead of me, like a horrible specter, Dick Wynn? I see poor Mendez forced to become a politician. Oh, call it statesman if you like! That makes it no worse, if no better! Hang the good old six-shooter on the wall to rust; put on a frock coat and a high hat, and talk diplomacy! Never more a straight shot; but only soft and sliding words to cover up what I mean! What a fate for a soldier!"

"It's going to bore you a lot," Dick said, sympathetically. Mendez burst out laughing at that.

"What do we do next?" Dick asked him.

"Next? Well, Dick Wynn, to-day everybody gets a rest, sleep, and three meals, especially our horses. To-night we borrow some dress suits and attend a banquet which the lords and ladies of Tuctu have decreed in our honor."

"In your honor, Ralph," Dick corrected.

"Oh, that's all right. We share the honors. It will be given up there where Ruiz gave one, his final banquet, last night." He smiled grimly. "Who knows if it will also be *our* last! You will see a different side of our life and character to-night. Not *Indios* and *llaneros*, but the old Spanish-American aristocracy; the culture, beauty, and wealth; the people whose lineage goes back to some of the oldest titles of Spain, and whose families were founded here by the proud Spanish-Arab gentlemen who first erected forts; and to the daughters of Incas and of chiefs who wore cloaks of humming birds' breasts, and sported their tiaras of iridescent beetles with all the pride of duchesses in diamonds."

"Oh! It'll be frightfully formal, eh?" Dick looked glum.

"Formal! It will make that banquet where we met in London look like a camp supper! On these occasions we are very formal. You will see only gravity, dignity, the elegance and punctiliousness of manner which is dying out in Europe, even in Spain, but which does not even decay as yet with us. And there will be speeches, very grave, probably very long, phrased in beautiful Spanish. I shall have to make one, too. At least one!"

"I should think that all the excitement would make

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them forget about being formal, and turn the banquet into a riot."

Mendez looked almost shocked.

"Never in the world," he said emphatically. "You North Americans have a wrong idea of us. You think we are very excitable all the time, and you do not realize our habits of self-control and formality. But to-night, you will see. Poor Dick Wynn! I hope you will not go to sleep at that banquet!"

Dick smiled rather plaintively. It sounded to him like a deadly dull evening.

"Well," he said, "we aren't so cold and self-controlled up north. And we've got some manners of our own, too. But if we'd gone through anything like this business, we'd sure let loose before midnight!"

"Here, never!" Mendez repeated. He fell silent and stood, with arms folded, staring over the magnificent expanse of valley below, where it seemed that all the colors that glint and shake from a pure crystal trembled above the sod, in flowers and roofs, waters, meadows, and sun-smitten rocks. Under the glare of a cloudless sky, incredibly blue and profound, all the colorful objects in the vast scene appeared to move ever so slightly, merging their tints in a soft yet intense rainbow haze, as if they had been made to quiver and unite by the blows of the sun's golden hammers.

"I never saw so much red in a landscape, from pinks to crimsons. And one smells roses everywhere," Dick said presently.

"The perfume of hope, and the red flaming aura

from a soil drenched with the blood of patriots. It is thus I think of Montalba's roses. Surely they bloom darker and richer because of the passion and sacrifice for liberty which has watered them!"

"Has there been much fighting for liberty here, Ralph?" Dick asked innocently.

"*Has there been much?*" Mendez repeated with an odd smile. "I am sure you could answer me, if I asked you some questions about the French Revolution. You learned something about that in school. But nothing about South America; which is not in Europe, but is the other half of your western world! Nothing about the men who dared so passionately and so greatly that they freed, not a single country, but a continent, from an imperial tyrant!"

"Tell me something about them now," Dick urged.

"If I begin to speak of liberty as an ideal on this soil, I must speak first of the Indians. Many of us have their proud free blood in us, and we honor them. They were the first warriors for liberty in the new world. They were not an inhospitable people, though they were fierce; and, in the very beginning, they often gave welcome to the Spaniards. But, in their greed for gold, the Spaniards almost immediately began to enslave the Indians, to force them to work in the mines. Then every native savage on this soil became the enemy of every Spaniard. They fought incessantly. Because the Spaniards had gunpowder, they forced their way into the interior of this continent. In some parts they were able to take root. But here, in Montalba,

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they could hold nothing but the coast and a few forts inland, such as this. Everywhere else the Indians, in time, drove them out. In our jungles you can find ruined foundations under the forest growth, where once forts or missions stood. To this day, there are wide stretches of this country where no white man dares to go. The Indians of those mountains and jungles still hold to the word handed down from generation to generation. They say, 'The white man's face is a slaver's face. Kill!' In any man, savage or civilized, just the pure passion for freedom is a noble thing, Dick; and beautiful, as the condor's wings above the mountain."

Mendez paused, to watch the upward flight of a giant bird against the silvery face of an Andean peak. Seeming to darken and diminish, as his soaring gave him distance, the condor vanished at last in the dazzle of silver and shadow on the serrated heights. Dick drew a deep breath. His blue eyes were bright from the eager thrill which always possessed him whenever *El Tigre* took him apart from the rest of the world, as now, and talked to him alone, man to man, of large and strange things.

"But the Indians could not keep the Spaniards out of the chief cities, such as Lima, Quito, Amarilla, Bogotá. More and more Spaniards came; and there were plantations as well as cities. A new racial type developed from the blending of Indian blood with those first Spaniards who were, themselves, mixed with Arab. And the time came when South Americans were no longer loyally content to lie under the heel of a faraway callous sovereign and his host of grafting governors, viceroys, and the—devil-knows-

what-you-call-'ems! They saw the North American colonies strike for liberty and win. They saw France do it. They decided to do it, too; though they knew it would not be an easy thing, because of the system of despotic military control, and because of the ignorance of the masses. One man had to begin it, to dare to plan it. He was Don Francisco de Miranda. For more than twenty-five years he carried that vision in his soul. He went abroad. He impressed his extraordinary personality on the rulers and statesmen of several lands. He won military distinction in their armies; seeking always for powerful friends and allies who would help him, with ships and guns, to free his own country."

"And did they?" Dick broke in.

"No. When he asked for *that*, they had always something else to do! They thought of the chickens in their own yards, which had to be fed! He had such defeats and disappointments as might have crushed him to powder, had he been made of iron or stone. But Don Francisco was made of a dream. So he could not be crushed. At last there came to him another man, a countryman of his, a very young man and very rich. His name was Simón Bolivar. A few years before, when he was not yet twenty, Bolivar had married and, ten months later, his beautiful young wife had died. Whereupon he made a vow never to remarry, so deeply had he loved her. He renounced the hope of family and of a life of ease on his estates, and sought for some ambition, or work, in life to occupy him. This, his meeting with Miranda gave to him. Bolivar's sorrow and loss were South America's gain; for he became her

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liberator. It took years of terrible struggles and sacrifices; but it was accomplished."

"I never did know much about them," Dick said; "I wondered just what they had done when I saw several statues of them in Amarilla. Evidently the people were grateful to them, to put up those statues; though I suppose that was done long after they were dead. Were they given great honors, Ralph, as George Washington was?"

Mendez smiled grimly.

"Miranda died in a Spanish prison, betrayed into captivity. Bolivar died an exile, in poverty, with only a poor servant to close his eyes. He had given everything to the cause; and, in the end, had been forced to flee from treachery. In the bitterness of his soul, he believed that all he had fought and sacrificed for was lost. And his last words, the cry of a broken heart, were, '*I have ploughed in the sea!*' Simón Bolivar. Born a millionaire and died in a borrowed shirt. There was a man!"

"That isn't a story with a happy ending, Ralph," Dick said. "It's awful. They ought not to have died like that!"

The iron look closed over Mendez's features like a black shadow.

"I don't know, Dick Wynn," he said. "What does it matter how a man dies, after his work is done? By treachery, assassination, in exile, or in prison—what of it? *He has done his work.*"

Dick thought about it for a minute. Then he shook his head and smiled a bit shyly.

"That's the big way to look at it, all right," he admitted. "But I tell you now, Ralph, *I'd* like some

glory and a few other good things, if I'd done what Miranda and Bolivar did! or what you've done."

Mendez's eyes sparkled; and the iron mask broke into crinkles of mischief.

"Ah ha!" he laughed. "Now Dick Wynn wants to be famous! All right. If we have good luck from to-morrow, and I take Amarilla, I promise you something. Oh my, yes! I'll set up a statue to you in the Plaza. There will be plenty of pedestals to choose from, after I get through pulling down the statues of some dictators, who had the nerve to put up their own effigies besides those of Miranda and Bolivar, whose work they have tried to undo! And you know how I will represent you? Ah ha! Killing three anacondas at once with that favorite U. S. A. machete called the toothpick! And I will inscribe it, 'Dick Wynn, the American Snake Charmer.' Ah ha!"

Chuckling, he pattered, as lightly as a cat, down the stone steps. From below he called back:

"I go to get some sleep. You better sleep, too. Because maybe we don't sleep again for a week, after we start off to-morrow."

"I say," Dick called after him. "What time is that banquet? I've got to be dressed in time."

"Oh, we won't be late. We get there eight—nine—ten—o'clock."

Dick grinned to himself. To him there was a whole hour's difference between dinner at eight and dinner at nine; but to Mendez apparently, here as well as in London, the set hour for dinner was whenever he happened to arrive!

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"I'm scared of that banquet to-night," he said, later to Uncle Horace.

"Why? I rather look forward to it as a pleasant interlude," Professor Wynn answered.

"Pleasant! It's going to be awful. Ralph has been telling me about it. He says it will be fearfully formal, with everybody on his best behavior, set speeches, and dignity enough to freeze your face. I thought they'd probably all let loose and whoop. But he says his people aren't really a bit like that!"

"Humph!" said the professor. "I don't pretend to understand these Montalbans; or, indeed, any Spanish-American people. But, I'll be hanged if I'm going to believe all they tell me about themselves! I had my eyes opened when my good friend, Gonzalvo, flung my portfolio at my head and, a few hours later, told me, with evident sincerity, that he was of a very pacific nature and never did violent things! I'll believe in the frozen faces when I see them. Not before."

"Well," said Dick, argumentatively, "I suppose Mendez knows how he himself behaves at these affairs."

"Ah, does he? Does he, indeed?" Uncle Horace retorted, with mild sarcasm; and then wandered off to take a nap.

CHAPTER XII

THE BANQUET

PEDRO woke Dick out of a heavy dreamless sleep, and brought him back into a world of star-sprinkled dusk, which smelled of jasmine and dewy red roses. Through a door left ajar, he could hear Mendez splashing in the governor's marble shower bath, and blithely singing a folk song of the pampas:

"The palm tree is over the grass,
The sky is over the tree:
I am over my horse,
My sombrero is over me."

Presently he had a flashing glimpse of a hard-muscled naked body—still sleek and shiny from the shower—which looked as if it had been hammered out of red copper. Mendez had a bundle of brilliantly colored silk, which he tossed to Pedro, speaking rapidly in Spanish.

"The governor's bath robe," he explained, brushing back from his face a lock of hair, that was dripping wet and Indian black. "To tell you the truth, I would be ashamed to put on such a thing. Sky-blue satin all embroidered in colored blossoms and gold butterflies! That is not the native custom of a *llanero* like me. It is very pretty for a woman. So I give it to Pedro for his mother." He smiled

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affectionately. "Women, even when they are old, like to wear pretty silks. And she will be pleased to have a present from the little Don Diego."

In another moment he was lost in a whirl of towels. Through the turkish nap of the whirl came melody, somewhat muffled and broken by the gasps of vigorous action.

"Am—o—ver—my—horse,
—Som—bre—ro—o—ver—me."

Dick was giggling about Mendez having given the governor's elaborate bath robe to the old peasant woman at the farm. Presently he had his turn in the marble shower. He lost his own breath for a moment when Mendez called to him.

"Don't imagine, when you turn those taps, that they are only nickel, like taps in New York hotels' room and bath! They are solid silver. And that mirror's frame is gold."

"Golly!" said Dick, almost reverently. "Say, he must have fancied himself, though! Like a girl. I guess he wasn't much of a man."

"Huh? No, no! That is your United States idea. Because Pilgrim Fathers had no silver taps; but took a bath diving off the hard-boiled egg of Plymouth Rock!" Dick shouted at that. "Montalba's Pilgrim Fathers," Mendez went on, "were those Arab-Spaniards, who gave banquets on jewelled dishes and served gold dust in the salt-cellars; and those Indian *caciques*, who decked themselves in the voluptuous colors and soft textures of tropical birds. The passion for display is as natural a heritage with us as its absence is natural to you."

For me, I lost some of this, living hard times in United States. But our men are not like girls! Don't you believe it! Ruiz had his silk bath robe and his golden mirror for a little while: and then died from a poisoned *lancera* and a jaguar's claws. Such is life, and such is death, in the tropics—where the jungle stalks us all, through the twisted trails of our own hearts, no less than through the fierce or treacherous impulses of others. Holy Smoking Moses! I am almost preaching a sermon! Hurry now, and get into your clothes. I am nearly dressed already."

When Dick emerged from his bath he found to his satisfaction that the evening suit, borrowed for him, fitted. The pumps were a bit tight and too high at the instep, but they would serve. There were pearl and onyx studs for the shirt, which was of the finest. He pinned in the rose, which Pedro brought for his buttonhole, with the air of a lord.

"I wish, for your sake, it would be lively," Mendez said, as they proceeded along the hall together. "But, with us, these affairs are very formal. You will not recognize Mendez to-night. So cold and solemn."

The triumphal feast was spread in the same great room whence *El Presidente* had fled in the guise of a serving woman. Dick had taken it for granted that all traces of that terrible night would have been cleared away. Indeed, it seemed to him almost gruesome to hold the banquet there at all. On entering he saw, at once, that it would be well to take nothing for granted in this fantastic country. Arrows and cage were still there. Only Ruiz's body

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and the wounded tiger were gone; the one to the grave, and the other back to the wild pampas.

The tables were set in a square against the four walls. The seat reserved for Mendez was in the center of the wall between the two windowed ends of the room facing the door. Suspended above it, as a canopy, was his jaguar's skin, the magic cloak which turned him at night into *El Tigre*. Swords hung on the wall behind his chair. The national colors were displayed on rafters and walls in floral pieces and in ribbons. One plain green silken banner, the color adopted by some Spanish-American labor unions, testified that the revolution led by Mendez was not for an exchange of dictators, but for the advancement of all classes of citizens. What caught Dick's breath and made him gasp was, first, the sight of the tiger's cage twined with blood-red roses and the three ribbons, and bearing a legend saying that *El Tigre's* cage was the red hearts of his countrymen, from which death, itself, could not release him. He saw the poisoned *lanceras* still sticking in the walls and even, here and there, in the floor; they, too, were twined with ribbons and dark red roses.

On the snowy damask of the table covering, glass and silver gleamed under the myriad candles in opalescent tints. Sprays of flowers, chiefly pink and white, were scattered along the center; but no tall vases stood to obscure any diner's view of the guest of honor. There were lesser places of honor, as Dick learned presently; one in the center of each wall, for himself, for Gonsalvo, and for Uncle

Horace. He turned to make a remark to Mendez, but found that he had disappeared. Dick surveyed the guests, now entering the room almost in silence, with grave bows to one another. There were men, old and young, in uniforms and decorations, and in plain coats. They bore themselves with a distinction which told of ancient and proud lineage. They represented the old aristocracy and the wealth and culture of Montalba. To Dick's pleasure, a number of the young men spoke English. All of them had traveled, or been educated, abroad; several had spent some time at Oxford or Cambridge as well as at institutions of learning in Spain, Germany, or France. He met two brothers who had been to Harvard.

The women were frankly dazzling. All were garbed in the latest Paris modes, to which most of them gave a picturesque Spanish touch by deft use of fans, high combs, mantillas, and clusters of flowers behind the ear. The younger ladies relied on the contrast of scarlet, yellow, or white flowers in their glossy black hair; while the matrons sparkled with jewels. The old style of coiffure was followed by most of the young ladies: but he noticed a few with bobbed hair. The owner of one of these was placed next to him. Her name was Julieta de Silva and she was the sister of the two young men who had been to Harvard. She spoke of Mendez proudly as "our cousin." Her fluffy blonde hair and white skin made a striking contrast with her large bright brown eyes. She suggested the outdoors, even a boy in the outdoors, with her compact slimness, her firm little hands and her laugh-

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ing directness. No one had told her that Dick spoke Spanish; so she endeavored to entertain him in her meager stock of English. And Dick found her efforts so highly amusing that he was mischievous enough to pretend entire ignorance of her native tongue.

"My brothers speak English good," she said, choosing her words slowly as one tests new ice, a step at a time. "But me, I not can speak. No, no." She made despairing gestures with both hands; her eyes rounded with tragic earnestness. "I not can; but I *speak!*" she concluded, and bubbled with laughter.

"I understand every word you say," Dick answered, imitating her slow and cautious delivery. She giggled with delight.

"Good. All right. We speak." Her brows wrinkled over the task of putting a sentence together before expressing it. "You do—no!—Do you—ride?" was what she came forth with at last: and she pronounced the final word as if it were spelled with three r's.

"Yes. I do ride—horses," Dick replied, adding the word "horses" solemnly after a pause. This was too much for Julieta. She leaned across him and babbled a stream of Spanish to her mother.

"He says he rides horses! *Madre de Diós!* What *should* one ride but horses? Giraffes, no doubt! Truly this young man from North America is very handsome, but he is not intelligent!"

Dick struggled successfully with his desire to laugh.

"Hush, Julieta. Do not raise your voice," her

mother admonished her. Julieta sent a frightened glance over the table.

"Me, I ride horses also," she informed Dick with subdued gravity. "Do you swemm?" she added.

"Yes, I swim. But only in water."

"Water?" she repeated, her eyes growing rounder. Her blonde bobbed head jerked forward again, and she burst into another stream of Spanish, with gesticulations.

"Mama! Mama! It is incredible that such a stupid young man should be so handsome and so brave! I ask you, with all respect, dear mama, does one swim in *chocolate*? Does one swim in *soup*? If one is a housefly, yes! Otherwise, no!"

Dick's face was as a mask, when she turned her eyes to it once more.

"Hush, Julieta. Do not raise your voice," said mama.

"Me, I also swemm, and with water," Julieta said in low tones. "You like to shoot?" She continued the conversation, determined to show every courtesy to this stranger whom her famous kinsman loved as a young brother. But that she found it rather a strain was suggested by a restless tattooing of the fingers of one hand on the tablecloth.

"Julieta," said mama; "your fingers! A young lady does not permit herself to exhibit irritation on such formal occasions."

"Yes, mama." She clenched her little hand. "You like to shoot?" she repeated.

"Yes, señorita. Only when I have a gun. When I have no gun I do not like to shoot."

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"Mama! Mama!" Julieta's voice ascended with a husky shrillness. She quivered in her seat. "Mama! Is it not permitted to throw even a dish of olives at the head of such an one? Mama! If I cannot throw the olives, I shall weep!"

"Hush, Julieta!" Mama's look was stern. "Do not raise your voice!" Julieta subsided with a sob. Dick bit his lip to hide his mirth and stared straight in front of him.

At that moment Mendez entered; and, as if he were a king, the guests greeted him by rising to their feet in respectful silence. Instead of walking directly to his seat, *El Tigre* paused and bowed to right and left, at first very gravely, then letting a slight smile of recognition flit upon an old friend, or a relative, here and there. As he passed close to Dick's table, he saw the excited, widened, worshipping eyes of the pretty Julieta. He stopped, his eyes warm with kindness, and gave her a personal greeting, which almost burst her heart open with pride.

"Dick Wynn should be happy to-night! Golden candles, roses, and a fairy princess beside him," he said, in Spanish; using the third person to give greater dignity to his compliment. When Julieta heard herself flattered in this wise, as if she were a grown-up and very great lady, her little bobbed head soared with tremulous arrogance and, by a haughty flip of her wrist, her painted fan flew open across her breast.

Dick, descendant of a line of courtly Wynns, knew instinctively how such a speech should be

answered in any land. In a manner as formal as Mendez's own, and bowing toward the enraptured Julieta, he said, also in Spanish:

"General de Mendez speaks of candles and roses. In the presence of General de Mendez's beautiful cousin I had not noticed them."

While Mendez went on slowly to his seat, Dick stole a glance at Julieta. A flush of furious embarrassment colored her brow. Her fan screened the lower part of her face. Over its edge, her eyes gleamed at him like two knife blades played upon by firelight.

"When they get mad in this country, they are really annoyed," Dick said to himself with a suppressed chuckle. He looked at her again, after they were seated and serving had commenced. Her eyes were no softer; they still stabbed at him.

"Incredibly evil villain!" she hissed. "You make a mock of me in English, when all the time you can speak Spanish! Oh! When shall I think of a vengeance so cruel as you deserve? Not for too long!"

"While you're waiting, let me pass you the olives," said Dick, grinning mischievously.

"Señor," she stormed at him in a husky crescendo, "do not address me further!"

"Hush, Julieta," said mama. "Do not raise your voice."

Dick occupied himself with his food, in silence. He had not intended to anger the girl so deeply. He felt sorry. Presently he was aware of a fleeting gesture; and an olive rolled over the rim of his plate

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and flopped into his soup. He heard a soft chuckle. He turned quickly. Julieta's eyes, glistening with fun, met his over the rim of her fan.

But for mischievous, teasing exchanges with Julieta de Silva, the long, long dinner would have been a terrible ordeal. Dick was grateful to her, as to a life-saver, before the meal ended and the oratory began. He did not care for speeches as a rule; but he listened to these carefully, partly because he felt they would help him improve his Spanish, and partly because the speakers referred to events in Mendez's career which were a new story to Dick. As speaker followed speaker with the rehearsal of brave deeds for liberty performed by heroic Montalbans in the past, with pledges of sacrifice for the present cause, with impassioned faith in the personal honor and patriotic ideals of their man of the hour, a tension spread throughout the atmosphere of the room. Voices, which had opened with cool flowing rhetoric, vibrated with passion; and the listeners swayed and breathed out like swimmers among waves. Dick, his throat dry, heard a sharp click as a stick of Julieta's fan snapped in the tense grip of her hand. Everywhere he looked, it seemed to him that he saw burning eyes, brighter than the candles. He did not know that his own eyes were aflame, and his own hands clenched.

Mendez rose to reply. The first part of his speech, which he had prepared in advance, was delivered with a strained and husky evenness that betrayed how hard he fought for self-control. Then memory failed him; and the volcanic inspiration of the atmosphere seized on him. His natural dynamic

force seemed magnified a hundred times. His voice, which, at full compass, was deep and harsh, roared over the gathering. Apparently unconscious that they had moved, people here and there jumped to their feet till every seat was empty. Then a shout of protest went up, because Mendez, a small man, was lost to view.

"*Tigre! Tigre!* Where are you, *Tigre?*" they shouted.

"I am here!" he answered; and leaped upon the table. "One of you has said, 'We love Mendez; but we follow not a man but an ideal.' Yes. That is true. For what is this flesh and blood of Mendez? It is the body of an ideal. *There is no other Mendez!*"

"*Tigre! Tigre!*"

With a swift sweep of his arm, Mendez tore down the jaguar's skin that had been suspended above his seat, and flung it about him. He seized a sword from the design of crossed blades on the wall behind him.

"*El Tigre* is the fierce and hungry soul of Montalba. His teeth are this liberating sword. He kills only for food. His food is honor and freedom. *El Tigre* walks alone, because he is many in one. He is Montalba united in one dream; one soul and one body, one hunger, one passion, one hope, and one color of blood!"

"*Tigre! Tigre!*" The cry became a roar and was followed by a crash, as glasses were lifted to him and then dashed to atoms on the walls or the floor. The guests surged toward Mendez, the men shouted and sang. The women caught up the

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flowers from the tables, tore the roses from the *lanceras* and the cage, and showered *El Tigre* with them. Dick lost Julieta in a running sparkle of rhinestone buckles, as she sprang upon the table, sped like a hare along it, and flung her arms about Mendez's neck. There was no shocked protest from mama. Mama was waving her handkerchief, her eyes raining tears. Gonsalvo, in a frenzy of patriotic emotion, led in the rush of a group of men who swung Mendez upon their shoulders and bore him away to the ballroom. The glass of broken globlets crunched to shimmering dust under their feet as they went.

"*Tigre! Tigre!*" Still shouting, the mob followed.

Dick bumped against Uncle Horace in the hall.

"Gee! Wasn't it great?" he gasped throatily. He saw that Uncle Horace's nearsighted eyes had an unaccustomed brightness, and that two red spots burned on his cheeks. He felt a slight unsteadiness in the hand with which Uncle Horace gripped his shoulder.

"It was. It was indeed," Professor Wynn agreed. "You will, no doubt, long remember your first experience of an austere formal Montalban dinner." He chuckled.

CHAPTER XIII

EL PRESIDENTE AGAIN

WHILE Mendez and his friends were treading the path of acclaim over roses and splintered crystal, a boat was pulling into shore far away, on the lower reaches of the river. It contained two men; one of them wore a woman's dress. By the happy discovery of a boat, with a man at the oars, the Illustrious Defender of Montalba had escaped the claws of the wounded jaguar, which had padded down the bank behind him as he fled from the fort, now in the hands of Mendez and the revolutionists. In the darkness the two men had trusted themselves to the rapid waters and had been carried beyond the danger of capture.

"It is fortunate the boat was a good one and also that we did not capsize," said *El Presidente*, in stepping ashore. "For to be eaten by cannibal fish would be no pleasanter than to die between the jaws of a jaguar. We may need this boat again. Tie it securely. Its rope is in the bottom."

In the blazing moonlight, the shadow of the other man was cast waveringly on a wide ripple as he leaped out with one end of the rope in his hand. The reflection of long slender limbs and body, their disproportions emphasized by the moving tide,

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suggested some fantastic spider of terrible legend crawling over a magic mirror and being dismembered by a blow that shattered the glass under it. *El Presidente*, stamping the cramp out of his legs, watched the tying of the boat.

"It is well hidden, except from the opposite shore," he said. "You have both gun and knife, Lopez?"

"Yes, *Excelentissimo*." The spidery form of Señor Lopez advanced to *El Presidente's* side.

"An automatic? Good. Hand it to me, and keep the knife. For I have no weapon at all."

After a fraction of hesitation, which was not lost on the dictator, Lopez passed the automatic to him. *El Presidente* kept it in his hand. Under his feminine garb were both the gun and the knife which he was never without. He had lied in order to get Lopez's firearm; since even a beloved dictator cannot always be sure of the loyalty of his special servitors. All the while that Lopez, as oarsman, was blistering his palms in his overlord's service, *El Presidente* had been wondering whether Lopez would reckon his chances good enough for an attempt to sell the Illustrious Defender to Mendez. He felt safer now that he had Lopez's automatic. Later, he would get his knife.

"Your Excellency's vigor and courage are beyond those of mortal man. Yet it might be well to rest for a while in the safety of this desert spot; purely as a precaution, however unnecessary," said Lopez, who had worked at the oars for twenty-four hours without stopping, except to dip up water in his sombrero for his Excellency to drink; while the latter

had done nothing but loll in the bottom of the boat, even lightly dozing at times.

"My vigor and courage will feel safer when we reach the fort of San Cristóbal, which is ten miles inland from this point by the mountain trail."

"Your Excellency's exactitude, even in the matter of mileage, is marvellous," said Lopez, sagging wearily against a rock. "Those more ignorant ones say it is over fifteen miles, indeed, seventeen miles, to be meticulously inaccurate."

"Seventeen miles to shepherders, perhaps. They, who loiter, consume time and call it distance. For us, two patriots with life at stake, haste will decrease the mileage to ten. Nevertheless, sit down and rest for a quarter of an hour. My faithful Lopez, tireless in your country's service! You have deserved well of Montalba. You will be recompensed."

"*Excelentissimo!* To serve your Excellency is already to be rewarded."

"Come, come, no titles here; no formality. We are but two patriots and comrades in an adverse hour. Sit down beside me as if I were only a common man."

"Such condescension! Such geniality!" Lopez murmured, sinking to the earth in glad obedience.

"We are hungry, but at San Cristóbal we shall eat. Meanwhile let that hope content us. I do not blame you that you fled from the banquet hall, last night, before me. In such moments a man looks out for himself."

"Did not *all* flee, *Excelentissimo?* And was it not necessary that I should find a safe way of escape,

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in case your Excellency happily survived to catch up with me?"

"No titles. No titles. We are comrades. And so you were thinking of me, Lopez? I might have guessed it! But, indeed, all the others did not flee. No. Several of them remained, pinned to the table among the roses. My esteemed cousin, Eulogio, received a *lancera* through his Adam's apple; and fell against the cage, to have his face clawed by the jaguar."

"Horrible!" Lopez shivered. "What sorrow for you, noble comrade, to have witnessed it!"

"On the contrary, Lopez; on the contrary. With all his responsibilities to his president and kinsman, myself, Eulogio Ruiz permitted himself to be deceived by Ulloa. He believed the liar's statement that Mendez and *El Tigre* were one and the same. Hush. Do not interrupt me. Eulogio, rashly credulous, sent for me; as doubtless Ulloa, being Mendez's agent, intended he should. Thus was I decoyed into needless peril, and later put to flight mantled with the drab shame of a serving woman's clothes. Though time was life to me, I lingered a moment for the satisfaction of looking upon my dead cousin, Eulogio; who had met the fate he deserved! And because I lingered, I saw the conqueror of Tuctu enter that room."

"You saw *El Tigre de San Cristóbal*?" Lopez gasped, shaking.

"I saw nothing of the sort. I saw Don Diego de Mendez, now of world renown. And he wore no jaguar's pelt, Lopez. He was garbed in the costume of a *llanero*. He was the same man I saw in the

last revolt, when he uselessly defied me; a little older, sterner, a bullet scar on his cheek, but the same Mendez, a human man with no claws but a six-shooter and a machete—dangerous enough claws they are, too, at the ends of *his* ruthless and resolute hands.”

“Then who is—the other?” Lopez’s voice was husky.

“I am not possessed of occult powers. I use only my intelligence. Remembering that Ulloa himself told my dear deceased cousin, Eulogio, where he had recently seen a jaguar, and that Eulogio sent hunters to the spot, who captured *that* jaguar, I do not *know*, but I surmise, that the tiger we had in the cage was *El Tigre* during his transformation into the beast. Have you not heard of the claw marks left on the face or body of *El Tigre’s* victims? *I saw them on Eulogio’s face!* I saw them, Lopez, with these eyes! That jaguar would not have mauled Mendez, which was the sport Eulogio had planned. Undoubtedly Mendez knows the words, or signs, which make *El Tigre* act as a man. Had these two met there, while we feasted, Lopez, you and I would not be sitting now in this moonlight together, romantically breathing our attachment for each other. I have no power of divination, but I am convinced of this thing.”

“It must be so, then.” Lopez shivered.

“I have had a miraculous escape; and Eulogio is justly dead. Nevertheless, since he was my kinsman, I shall avenge him when Mendez is captured. Now, do you know why I am going to the fort of San Cristóbal?”

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"Who can read so great a mind?"

"I will tell you. From the captain there I may learn something about these two men; for both Mendez and *El Tigre* came originally from that region. But there is another reason. San Cristóbal is close to the border across which Mendez and his outlaws fled after their defeat in the last revolt. Somewhere, just over that border, I am sure Mendez has a secret depot of arms and ammunition. He is too clever a soldier to think that he can march on Amarilla and capture it, defeating my army, with only a handful of outlaws and Indians and no machine guns."

"He opposes his president. Does that show the wisdom of a clever soldier?"

"Lopez, I use only my intelligence. And my intelligence tells me that Mendez was not given medals in the World War for being a fool! He knows how little true loyalty men feel. Therefore, he counted on the whole of Tuctu joining him as soon as he had surprised the fort: which no doubt they did! He plans to leave Tuctu in the hands of these disloyal citizens, and march on to the next town and capture it, probably without a blow, since the fall of Tuctu will incite all the disloyal ones there also. The garrison may even join him; so, possibly, inevitably, will other garrisons, until his army, recruited from *my* gendarmes, is large enough for the attack on the capital, for which machine guns are needed. We know Mendez did not reënter Montalba by way of any of the seaports; we have watched too well for him there! He entered on land, slipped over the border. Where? Near San

Cristóbal, no doubt; his old home and the home of his ally, *El Tigre*! Somewhere just beyond San Cristóbal, Lopez, his guns are hidden. That is the logical place for them. He will go there with a few men secretly to get them. We go to watch for him, assisted by the gendarmes of the fort. Come, rise, march! With that prospect, the miles grow less than ten!"

El Presidente led the way up the bank. It was safe enough to turn his back here. If Lopez meditated treachery, he would wait to effect it until they were nearer to the fort and the reward.

"This trail is not so much in use as formerly," he said, presently. "There are vines stringing across it here." He turned, holding out his hand. "Give me your knife."

Again there was an instant of hesitation before Lopez complied.

"It is I who should do this menial labor, *Excelentissimo*," he protested, drawing the knife but still holding it.

"No titles. No titles. We are comrades. You have done the hard work with the oars. It is now my turn. Come! The knife!"

Lopez handed it to him, unable to resist, even here, the baleful man who had kept him a tremulous creature for years.

"It is strange that Mendez can always find succor and safe haven in the neighboring republics," he said, as he followed wearily after his master.

"That is purely a personal matter. He is well liked; being intelligent, brave, and charming. And his exploits in many parts of the world

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appeal universally to the Latin-American imagination."

"You see the reasons for everything, with a miraculous shrewdness. Therefore, doubtless, it has also occurred to your Excellency that the presidents of other countries are jealous. *They* are limited to short terms. Think how these short-term presidents must envy *you*, whom your people's love has retained in office twenty years in defiance of the constitution! It is for this reason, chiefly, that they blink at Mendez's unneutral activities on their soil. Indeed, has not one large Latin-American republic withdrawn its ambassador from our shores, asserting that it will not countenance the dictatorship which defies the constitution of Montalba? And others have debated taking like action, in their congresses." There was malice in Lopez's reminder of a fact which irritated the Illustrious Defender of Montalba.

"One United States, or European, capitalist is worth more to me than twenty Latin-American ambassadors," said his Excellency curtly. He tramped on sturdily, in silence. Lopez followed with tired steps; and a sour heart, in which mischief began to foment.

Twenty-four hours sleeplessly at the oars; seventeen dark stumbling miles through the forest home of the puma and the poisoned snake; and if, in the end Mendez proved the victor, then a dangling death from a lamp-post for Señor Lopez, henchman of the dictator! For the first time in the years of his dependency Señor Lopez gave his aching muscles to his country. Hitherto, he had sacrificed only honor

and conscience; and—never having possessed either—this had been no sacrifice at all. His body was too weary and painful to supply the vitality necessary for a passionate rage at the indomitable and dire old man of sixty, who pushed on ahead of him. But a cold venom descended from his brain through his blood, like an unseasonable frost; and the rose of loyalty withered.

Shortly after dawn, Señor Lopez staggered through the gate of San Cristóbal, in the wake of his *presidente*, and fell on the ground inert, spent. He was conscious of but one thought, one emotion, one aim—vengeance; vengeance for his anguished flesh.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BURIED GUNS

MENDEZ, with Dick beside him, left Tuctu early on the morning after the banquet. The army, augmented by a number of men from the surrounding haciendas, strung along the sunny hill road behind its leader. As usual, Brothers Perez were in the van. With the exception of the newly recruited gentlemen of Tuctu, they all rode in *llanero* fashion. Their saddles had the curved pommels and high backs and the triangular-shaped metal stirrups of the *llanero's* equipment. The narrow stirrups permitted only four bare toes to squeeze in, while the outer rod fitted in snugly next to the fourth toe, the little toe curving around it and gripping it.

"In this way," as Mendez explained, "you can't lose your stirrups. So, no matter how your horse acts, you never get thrown. The *llanero* daren't risk being thrown and seeing his horse run away from him. Lose your horse on the pampas, and you're a dead man! Good economists would frown upon the *llanero*, because he spends all he has, and goes in debt for a lifetime, to get a silver horn and silver stirrups for his saddle. But why not? His saddle is not only home and country to him. It is his very life. So he makes it beautiful and lives in it as a

king. Indeed, what monarch is so proud as the *llanero*, riding barefooted in silver stirrups?"

"Sure. It's a great life if your little toes don't weaken." Dick grinned. "But, right now, Uncle Horace and I feel that ours will never be the same again. I could hardly get those dress shoes on over mine last night."

Mendez laughed.

"Stick around Montalba with me for a while; and you'll get used to anything!"

"There's plenty to get used to, all right. But it comes too fast," Dick said.

Later on in the day Mendez called a halt. He explained that he and Dick and the Brothers Perez would ride on to the place where his guns were buried. He put Gonsalvo in command of the rest of his men, with orders to disperse among the rocks and secrete themselves until after dark. Little Perez would return to tell Gonsalvo when and where to rejoin Mendez; and Gonsalvo was then to come on, with the men, at top speed.

"San Cristóbal must be in our hands before morning," he said. "It is the strongest garrison outside of Amarilla. I know who are my friends there; but *El Presidente* has also men there he can trust. Colonel Oritz is his son-in-law. And Oritz's wife brought him half a million dollars when she married him. But, in spite of these happy sentimental and financial ties, we must take San Cristóbal without delay!"

"Only the five of us go for the guns; you and I and Brothers Perez," said Dick.

"No. Seven."

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"Seven?"

"Certainly—Pio and Concepción! I would not ignore and insult those two chivalrous soldiers; the only marmoset and the only macaw who ever fought for the liberation of human beings! Ah ha!" He chuckled; and dashed off at a gallop.

It was hard going. Mendez led the way into the mountains, where there was no trail so far as Dick could see. Over rocks, fallen trees, and gullies, leaping narrow chasms, skirting high precipices, they went at the same rapid pace. Dick, who had never done such rough riding as this, had reason to be thankful for his *llanero* stirrups and the recently educated grip of his little toes. A spill from the saddle here would almost surely have meant a broken neck.

"Where's *El Tigre's* skin?" he asked, as they paused for a drink from a mountain current.

"Under my poncho," Mendez answered. "I may need it to scare off a spy while I am on foot digging up the guns. I don't expect any such thing; but you never can tell!"

It was just after sunset when Mendez said:

"We are there. Now we put on our boots."

Every man's boots, of course, hung from his saddle. Dick looked down on a little plateau of grass, watered by a wide pondlike stream, which was darkening in the swift fall of dusk. Mendez left José Perez in charge of the horses and descended, perhaps a hundred yards, on foot with his three other companions. Leaving them, in turn, in the shelter of the fringe of trees, he moved cautiously into the open space. At times he blended with the shadows,

so that Dick lost sight of him; then again the boy knew where he was by his black silhouette against the silvered amethyst of the water.

Presently he returned.

"Everything seems to be all right," he said. "I uncovered the spades. Now, you understand your instructions? You, Dick, listen particularly." He went on in English, "If we are surprised, beat it! In this kind of warfare, it is every man for himself. Nobody is to try to look out for Mendez. Drop into the brush; hide, and scoot for the horses. Don't stop to shoot, unless your man is in your way; then better use your machete. The thing is to get off, beat it—what's that new slang?—do a fade-away!"

"You think it's likely?" Dick whispered, thrilled.

"Anything is likely. I am talking to you. I don't need to tell Juan and Little Perez how to look out for their skins. Juan made an escape once by rolling under the belly of the horse of the man who was looking for him! Come on."

Stooping, and moving cautiously, because of possible travelers on the hill road high above them, leading from San Cristóbal—which was across the river—over the border into the next country, Dick, Juan, and Little Perez followed Mendez. They were soon busy unearthing the guns. Perhaps a half hour had passed when Dick heard the call of a night bird from beyond the water; and an answering note from the opposite side of the grassy space, where he labored beside Mendez. Instantly he felt Mendez's heavy hand on his shoulder, thrusting him down into the tall grass.

"Beat it!" Mendez hissed. Immediately Dick

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heard the thud of hoofs and saw mounted men dash out of the woods. One of them passed him so close that the horse's hind foot just barely grazed his knee. Evidently these men, watching from ambush, had marked Mendez for capture and were indifferent as to whether his companions escaped or not. For they plunged down upon him from all sides. His arm was grasped from behind as he was in the act of firing at the rider in front of him. He dropped his revolver and machete in the grass, and struggled with his captors. But the odds against him were too many. He was a prisoner.

Dick had disobeyed the order to "beat it." Truly he had seen enough of this jungle warfare, with its tigers and fire and poisoned arrows, to realize that none of the rules of sportsmanship obtained in it—if indeed they ever did with the mass of men in any war. It was all right for Juan and Little Perez to make off. They were jungle creatures, raised in the jungle code. Probably, too, they would ride like mad to tell Gonsalvo, if the gendarmes had not surprised José, too, and taken the horses. But he, himself, had learned a different code from his gallant and chivalrous father. Orders or no orders, it simply was not in Dick Wynn to desert his friend and leader in such a crisis as this. He decided to trail along in the darkness, keeping the troop within sight. There might be *something* he could do to help Mendez escape! The mere hope of it was worth any risk.

He thought of the fierce and scornful jaguar, which had escaped the pampas fire by leaping through a group of men with pointing guns: and of

the other, with the wounded foot, springing, in a tawny arch against the moon-flooded sky, over a dark space where steel death grew like reeds in a marsh. Fierce, scornful, and fearless, the spotted tiger of these new-world jungles seemed to possess the power to paralyze his foes in the moment when he took his desperate chance for survival. No matter if *El Tigre's* captors were over a score and well armed, while he was without weapons. Let him but see the barest chance of freedom; and he, too, would make the perilous leap!

It was easy to keep the troop in sight, because they carried a few lanterns. Dick rescued Mendez's revolver, and then ran stooping through the grass into the brush which skirted the ascent. He had to trust that the men above him would not hear the sound of his body crashing through the brush, because of the hoofbeats of their mounts on the narrow stony trail, and their own self-congratulatory conversation. He saw that a detachment rode ahead, leaving a gap between themselves and those who had Mendez in charge. Mendez was on foot. A man walked beside him, leading his own horse; and two riders followed close on their heels. Evidently they had no fear of losing their prisoner, knowing that a man was helpless in that country without horse or weapons.

Mendez had described the lay of the land here. So Dick knew that, a few miles farther on, the men would dip down with the trail in an easy slant to the river, which was shallow enough there to ford easily. On the other side, the trail continued over a dozen miles to San Cristóbal. If they once got their

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prisoner inside the fort walls, there would end both Mendez and the revolution. Well, *they must not!*

That gap between the van and the men who immediately guarded Ralph, inspired Dick Wynn with a wild idea. It was a crazy plan, he admitted; but it was the only one that came into his mind. He thought hard about it, as he plunged on.

He might have felt more cheerful about his wild idea if he could have known that it was Señor Lopez who paid Mendez the respect of dismounting and walking beside him, and if he could have known, also, all that was in Señor Lopez's mind regarding his more than imperial master, now sleeping off his fatigue in the handsome mansion of an obsequious son-in-law. But Dick Wynn knew none of these things. He would make his own leap entirely in the dark.

Dick had ridden with Montalbans long enough to know that both riders and horses were too impatient to keep up a walk for long. He counted on a quickening pace by the vanguard, which would widen the distance between them and Mendez and increase any chances his plan had of success.

He heard what his ears strained for, presently. The horses, nearing the descent, were pushing forward more eagerly. He marked a jut of the high cliff above the narrow road. Even in daylight it would have shut the two parties off from view of each other. As the horsemen rounded it, single file, he climbed, tearing hands and face in the sharp brush, up, as fast as he could go, to the road. Then, panting from his exertions, he ran to meet the men who conducted Mendez. He wanted to reach them

before they could round the cliff. And, as he ran, he called in low, gasping tones:

"Señores! Help! Help! There is terrible danger! Help!"

Quite naturally Señor Lopez ordered a halt, at the sight of so unusual an apparition as a man stumbling on foot along that road and calling for succor.

"Something has happened to our comrades in front!" said one of the riders.

"What is it? Who are you?" Lopez demanded.

Dick, still hoarsely croaking of peril, rushed on till he fairly catapulted himself upon Lopez, grasping at him with both hands as if to steady himself. In so doing, he knocked from Lopez's hand the gun he was carrying.

"Halt, señores! It is death to go on! *El Tigre* is there! I have seen him! More terrible than can be told or imagined!" Dick almost grovelled in his simulation of abject fear.

"*El Tigre!*" Lopez exclaimed. His blood, never too thick with courage and steadfastness, thinned to ice water. His scalp pricked with cold. The hands, with which he tried to shake Dick off, were clammy.

"What is this nonsense? I do not believe it!" Mendez said harshly. "Let us go on!"

"Now we know it is true!" one of the gendarmes said. "Because the Illustrious Defender himself has told us that Mendez and *El Tigre* are friends. You wish to go on so that he may rescue you, and destroy all of us!"

"No, no! Do not go on, señor," Dick, apparently still too terror-crazed for thought, gasped at Mendez next. And, as he clung to Mendez's poncho,

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he slipped a revolver from under the folds of his own poncho into his leader's holster. "Señor, you do not know what I have seen! Horrible things!"

"Witches on broomsticks!" said Mendez, mockingly.

"Señor Lopez," said one of the men, "would it not be better for you to compel this man to tell his story before we go on? His Excellency himself put you in command of us to-night, for the capture of Mendez. Though you are not a soldier, even in the capital; much less in our mountains!" he added.

"Tell me everything plainly," Lopez ordered, unsteadily.

By this time Dick was aware that he had seen this man somewhere before. The mention of Amarilla recalled to him at once his conversation at the hotel with the polite stranger on his first day in the Montalban capital. For a moment he was nervous, lest Lopez also recognize *him*. Then he took heart, realizing that there was little resemblance, even in a good light, between that blond boy in American clothes and Dick Wynn as he looked now in poncho and sombrero, his skin burned to a coffee-and-cream tan. Nevertheless, he kept his face shadowed from the moonlight, now beginning to fall, as he told the yarn which he had invented while he slashed through the prickly brush. He had been riding along by the river, preparing to cross at the ford, when he had heard strange sounds in the forest. He had dismounted and crept cautiously up the bank; because there were rumors of a rebel named Mendez. Surely, it was every loyal citizen's

duty to examine strange noises so near to San Cristóbal? To his horror, he had seen a jaguar on a spotted horse, with men and beasts following him. His horse must have heard, or seen, too; for it had dashed off like a crazed thing. Evidently *El Tigre*, for it could be no other than the dread Man-Jaguar, had known of the gendarmes returning by that road, and had attacked them. And so on.

"If you do not believe me, señor, send your men, who are mounted, a few paces ahead very cautiously," he said. "Let them look along the road from the other side of the cliff that juts there on the path. But tell them not to take the lantern. Let them wait there in the dark, very quietly, and listen for the sound of hoofs on the road. There will be yet time for us all to ride back, in the opposite direction, as fast as we can go. For surely one of you will not refuse to take me also on his horse?"

The idea of sending some one else to investigate appealed to Señor Lopez. He ordered the two men to do as Dick suggested.

"It is well known that *El Tigre* is your friend," he said to Mendez. "If he comes upon us, I hope you will remember to tell him that I, Señor Maria Vicente Lopez of Amarilla, a man of great importance there, have treated you with all honor. To tell you the truth, General de Mendez, I am no longer so convinced of the blessings of the present dictatorship. There are things, general, which no true patriot ought to suffer. Let us be friends, therefore." He extended his hand.

His friendly gesture brought immediate response.

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For, seeing that the two gendarmes had crept out of sight around the jut, Mendez promptly knocked Señor Lopez down—and out. Then he turned Lopez's horse round, and, with a cut of the whip, sent it racing along the road in the other direction.

CHAPTER XV

THE CANNIBAL FISH

"QUICK," he said; and plunged off the road into the dark brush below. Dick leaped after him. They stumbled, jumped, and rolled down the high cliff to the grassy flat. They lay inert there, bruised and scratched, the breath pounded out of them.

"Now keep still, and listen," Mendez said. "By this time, they have found Lopez—what's that prize-fighting slang?—on the mat? Taking the count? Huh? Now they know it was a trick. A smart trick, too, Dick Wynn! Ah ha! Hear that?" Two shots cracked from above; but, as the fugitives were invisible, the bullets did no one any harm.

"Now they are racing after the main body to tell them the good news." He chuckled. "That gives us more time, and a safer opportunity for traveling away from here. They will hunt for us most of the night; because they will be afraid to go back and report that they had me once and then lost me! You did a very brave and clever thing, *amigo*. I am not a sentimental man. I say little; but I remember long."

Dick was too intensely stirred by Mendez's words to be able to answer him. But he knew that Mendez would not expect an answer—Mendez understood!

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"Ought we to go and see if José left your horse?" Dick asked presently.

"He would not leave it. Brothers Perez don't leave anything of value!" Mendez chuckled again. He was in excellent spirits.

"Juan and Little Perez were already making their getaway, what you call 'fading,' before the gendarmes came out of the woods. They are nature-men too, like me. And they beat it as soon as they heard that birdcall. If I had been closer to the woods, I also would have escaped. Those gendarmes were certainly fools."

"Why, Ralph?"

"Tooting in such excellent mimicry of a bird which never toots at night! To me, or to Little Perez, that was as convincing as the sound of an alligator barking perfectly from the top of a cook stove!" He chuckled again softly. "Ah! Now they are coming back. Always before, I loved our tropical moon, so large and bright! Now I say, drat her round face! She comes on, however, and nobody can stop her. We will work down into that lower bit of pampas and keep quiet there a while. I hope we don't crawl on a sleeping jaguar. They like these grassy places, with water. I am glad those gendarmes gave me time to find my machete."

Slowly, and with as little motion as possible to shake the grass, now that the moon was beginning to make her ill-timed observations of the flat, they crept on into the larger meadow.

"Duck down," Mendez whispered. Dick obeyed. Mendez slipped off his poncho and spread it over their heads on the stiff grass stalks. It would lie

like a patch of natural shadow and prevent the moonlight from flashing upon the steel of their weapons.

"We do nothing," Mendez whispered, "unless one of them comes so close that he is bound to discover us. Then I have to stop him quietly before he can give warning." He shifted his machete to his right hand.

They could hear the men now, thrashing about in the woods and the pampas. Evidently they were widely scattered. Not all had descended from the road, since it was always possible that Mendez had gone off on Lopez's horse. The two under the poncho had lain there, perhaps an hour, when shouts from the road informed them, as well as the gendarmes below, that Lopez's horse had been caught. Then followed a debate as to whether Mendez had not ridden it part of the way and then let it go, taking to the woods at some point farther on.

Presently Dick felt the pressure of Mendez's elbow. Peering out, he saw a gendarme barely ten feet away. The man was looking in another direction. Dick held his breath. The gendarme was staring hard and apparently listening. Suddenly, he shouted and made a rush toward the brink of the slow stream, and away from their hiding place. His companions, who were all quite a distance off, shouted back excitedly, and began to dash to the same spot. Then there was a hoarse scream from the gendarme:

"El Tigre! El Tigre!"

Dick had a glimpse of him, plunging back toward

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his comrades. He heard other voices, in frenzied shouting, and a small fusillade of wild shots; then the noise of a dozen horsemen getting out of the pampas and up the bank with mad speed. Presently he heard the pounding of hoofs on the hard road. He wondered what it meant.

Mendez stood up and looked over the scene.

"Our friends have gone home," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"What happened?" Dick asked.

"I think that gendarme rushed over there because he expected to find me. But he found what my *Indios* call my Little Brother." He laughed softly.

"A real jaguar, Ralph?" Dick gasped.

"Yes. They like such places as this. The game comes here to drink; and so they are sure of killing food. I bet you *el tigre* was eating something over there; and, when our friend disturbed him, he leaped out and made for the woods. And they thought it was the Man-Jaguar! So they have run home. If my Little Brother did not finish his meal, he will come back. We better get out of here!"

It was a long and tedious crawl into the woods at the farther side of the place where the guns lay partly unearthed. Here they rested for a while. Then they went on.

"I wish I knew what Gonsalvo decided to do; that is, if Brothers Perez got back to him with the news that I was a prisoner. Oh! if only we had horses!" Mendez said.

Some time later he paused to look at his watch.

"Listen! Horses!" he whispered excitedly.

Screening themselves from the moonlight, behind

trees, they watched and waited. Suddenly Mendez gave a shout. He had recognized Gonsalvo. A few moments later he and Don Felipe were gripping each other's hands and shoulders.

"Your horse, *capitán*," José Perez murmured courteously at his side. "And yours also, Don Dick."

"Hullo, hullo!" Mendez greeted him. "You did not sell my horse yet? How is that?"

"*Capitán*, there was no opportunity," José answered, almost reproachfully. "Besides, when I heard the birdcall, I knew these were stupid men and, therefore, that most probably my *capitán* would escape from them easily later. Whereupon, my *capitán* would need his horse."

"What! You thought of all that?" Mendez looked amazed.

"Yes, *capitán*, and of more than that," Little Perez put in proudly. "For this horse of our *capitán's* is altogether extraordinary, being spotted like *El Tigre's* coat. And, no doubt, many people have heard of this altogether extraordinary horse. Therefore we would run great risks in trying to sell it to the master of a hacienda along this road."

"*Capitán*," Juan added, "it would not be intelligent to try to sell this horse; above all in the territory of your friends. *Capitán*, Brothers Perez are intelligent men!"

Mendez laughed out loud with delight.

"Where do we go from here?" Dick wanted to know. He was already in the saddle.

"Huh? We go and take San Cristóbal! There's no time to get more guns. We don't need them so much for San Cristóbal; only for Amarilla. Come

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on." He galloped headlong down the slope toward the river.

Mendez halted them sharply while they were still in the covert above the edge of the stream.

From the other shore, a boat was slipping into the current. The river was narrow and the moon shone like day upon the two men rowing and the third who sat, idle, but keenly scanning the opposite bank. The Illustrious Defender, no longer in woman's garb, was hasting out of the danger zone. Mendez had escaped; and, according to the terrified gendarmes and Lopez, *El Tigre* had been seen. *El Presidente* was taking no chances. If either, or both, of these dangerous creatures attacked San Cristóbal, he would not be there! He had said nothing to Señor Lopez, except to congratulate him on his escape. But the rage that engulfed him, as he entered that boat, was not directed against Mendez, nor *El Tigre*; but against Lopez who had let himself be fooled, even as Ruiz, and had thus increased the perils of his master, the president of Montalba.

"Do we fire?" Gonsalvo demanded, fiercely.

"No!" Mendez replied sharply. "We are not assassins."

"Then, at least, let some of us ride in and capture him!"

"No. That would be sure death. See how the water looks, even close to the shore. Something, a cow or a mule, has just been killed in crossing, perhaps by an alligator. The river here now is full of cannibal fish."

"The *caribe*!"

"What is that, Ralph?" Dick asked.

"It is a horrible thing. A fish something like a flounder in appearance, but fatter. It has very sharp teeth. It goes in enormous schools. You may cross a river a dozen times and not see them. But, if blood is in the water—well, they must smell it for miles. And they come in thousands. They attack the feet, cut the creature down, whether animal or man, that is, if it is crossing on foot in shallow water; if swimming in deeper water, they attack the whole body. In an incredibly short time nothing is left but the bones. No, no. We don't go into that water yet."

When Little Perez pleaded to be allowed to shoot holes through the boat, so that *El Presidente* would sink into the maws of the *caribe*, Mendez drew his revolver and promised instant death to any man who attempted that!

The boat had barely made midstream at the shallow ford, when another man ran down to the water, yelling to the boatmen to return for him. It was Señor Lopez, whose experiences that night had reawakened all his old loyalty to his Excellency. He, also, did not wish to be in San Cristóbal when it was attacked by Mendez, who had responded to his offer of friendship by a blow on the jaw; or by the terrible beast he had seen near the buried guns.

"I cannot turn back, my faithful Lopez," his Excellency answered. "But the water is only knee-deep here, little more. So, come and climb into the boat. You will not mind a slight wetting for my sake." He was peering over the bow of the boat into the shallow water. Lopez hastened to obey.

A moment more, and he uttered a fearful scream and, by a violent effort, threw himself forward so

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that his hands grasped the side of the boat. The watchers saw the Illustrious Defender crash something, probably the butt of his pistol, down on Lopez's hands, breaking their hold.

"Ruiz to the tiger! You to the *caribe*! I am avenged on two fools!"

There was some dispute about his Excellency's exact words, because of the disturbing noise of Mendez's revolver. He had shot Lopez through the head.

"Who can understand our *capitán*?" said Juan Perez mournfully. "He lets *El Presidente* escape; yet he shoots the other, when the *caribe* made such a shot unnecessary!"

At the sound of the shot which gave Señor Lopez a more humane death, the rowers made as if to thrust back to land. His Excellency was ~~seen~~ to threaten them with his weapon an instant, before he ducked down into the hold, out of range. No doubt, as he lay there, he swung his gun swiftly from one man to the other. The rowers pulled with all their strength, under that inspiration.

"Ralph! What a horrible thing!" Dick's face had blanched.

"Forget it, Dick." Mendez's hand fell heavily on the boy's shoulder. "It is one of those sights a man dares not remember!"

The somber silence that followed was broken, presently, by the hoarse bark of a tiger from the water's edge, far down below the ford.

"That is probably the tiger that was in the pampas with us," Mendez said to Dick.

"Why does he keep up that awful roaring?" Dick

asked. His nerves were on edge. His hands trembled. The horrid cry of the fierce beast continued. Mendez laughed. It was a nervous laugh, as if something had snapped in him.

"Look there! No, downstream! You see those black things sticking up in the moonlight?"

Dick, watching, saw what appeared to be the ends of floating logs driven above the surface by hidden snags or sand bars. "Oh, he is cute, *el tigre!*" Mendez said. "Those are alligators. When our tiger wants to cross a river he stands on the bank and barks, and barks. Then the alligators come down from upstream, because they think they hear some food talking. The tiger counts their snouts, and decides there are so many that the water up above is now safe enough. Then he slinks quietly upstream, along the shore for, maybe, a quarter of a mile, and swims in comfort across. He does us a good turn to-night; because the *caribe* will hurry away ahead of the alligators. Look!"

Along the river's edge came the jaguar, beautiful and graceful in the moonlight, and silent as velvet. At the ford, he entered the stream. They saw his lifted head, as he went safely over the watery path which his jungle strategy had cleared for him.

"Come on! They are waiting for us in San Cristóbal!" Mendez cried, jubilantly. "My Little Brother shows us the way!"

Laughing, he flung his tiger cloak around him, and rode his spotted horse at a gallop into the river on the trail of the swimming jaguar.

CHAPTER XVI

A TRAP IS SET FOR THE TIGER

As soon as Mendez had entered Tuctu, and before he could cut the wires, a friend of the government had notified Colonel Ortiz, commander of the garrison of San Cristóbal. Ortiz had not let grass grow under his feet. He had sent messengers to call in those Indians, who were allies of *El Presidente*, from their territory in one of the jungles below the foot of the range. These savages received a small dole from the government on the understanding that they were not to molest travelers on the highways, and were to take the warpath when called upon. If they paid little attention to the first condition, they were, at least, always ready and willing to perform the second!

As with *El Tigre's* Indians, their chief weapon was the big bow, and the long arrow which was usually poisoned with *curare* for purposes of war. But these Indians did not make *curare* themselves. Its manufacture was a sort of jungle monopoly with the fierce tribes of the upper Verde, who had allied themselves with *El Tigre*. Mendez's allies supplied this deadly poison, which they made from the concentrated and jellied sap of a creeper locally called *mavacure*, to other tribes, in trade. But this year,

under his instructions, his Indians had traded no *curare* to the government's Indians.

Colonel Ortiz had begun his plans for defense, then, some time before his imperial father-in-law had arrived on foot after escaping the perils of Tuctu and the river. From *El Presidente*, he had heard the latter's theory that Mendez, for purposes of his own, was merely pretending to be *El Tigre*.

"They are friends, but not one man," his Excellency had said, while feeding abundantly on a chicken and rice *sancoche* at the Colonel's board.

"Then, in your opinion, this is a revolution with two leaders, equally dangerous?"

"It would appear so."

Whereupon Colonel Ortiz had concentrated his hard and vacant stare at a spot in about the middle of the table, and said nothing for some time. Like his distinguished relative by marriage, Don Plutarco Ortiz was an Indian who had begun life as the son of a small land owner, and had, later, adopted a career more profitable to him than that of agriculturist. He had a broad squat body, all hard flesh and muscle; and round protruding black eyes, like jet marbles, with a glassy stare, set in a large heavy face. He was a silent man, who gave the impression of being deeply thoughtful; and he had the respect of the soldiery. In *El Presidente's* experience, men who said little and thought much, and held the respect of the soldiery were very likely to begin presently to think about revolutions. To prevent the slow mind of the silent Don Plutarco from reaching this turn of thought, *El Presidente* had created him his son-in-law; and had dangled before him

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appetizing bait in the form of a speedy advance to the rank of general and, possibly, commander-in-chief of the army.

"Well? Well?" his Excellency snapped impatiently at last; as Don Plutarco's silent polished stare threatened to continue long enough for the glass to turn to fossil.

"Illustrious father-in-law, rules obtain in all national sports; each has its own type. In Spain, the bull fight: in North America, the baseball: in Montalba, the revolution. One matador, the idol of the arena: not two matadors. One man with a bat: not two men with bats, to hit one ball. One leader of a revolution; not two leaders, to gain one presidency. Illustrious father-in-law, the spectacle of two leaders of one revolution, and, moreover, two leaders who were friends, does not obtrude itself in the history of Montalba, even as a legend," Don Plutarco concluded solemnly.

"You have made a long speech; but what does it mean?" was his Excellency's not too polite query.

"I have told you how once my father met a lawyer of this town and, on his advice, sent me to the school; so that I might also become a lawyer, since lawyers get money from farmers very easily—at least, such was my father's experience. Nothing but books and punishments were in the school; so, after two years, I ran away. But I am glad I saw one of those books, with pictures; for, because of it, *El Tigre* does not terrify me."

"What have books to do with it?" more impatiently.

"Much; especially the pictures. In a country

called Greece, which was once, long ago, in Europe, there was a traveling musician who had goat's feet. And there were others also, not musical, who had the bodies of horses. So that while a man-jaguar is unusual in Montalba, in the great world he is nothing extraordinary. But undoubtedly he is very vain of his powers. Nothing could so anger him as to know that Mendez pretends to be *El Tigre*. It is an affront, an insult. In this, I perceive the end of their friendship, as soon as *El Tigre* knows. I will send out Indian spies to try to discover *El Tigre*, so that he may be informed. I believe his home is in these hills. He is named for the peak of San Cristóbal. Let him then avenge himself on Mendez! Afterward, illustrious father-in-law, we can deal with *El Tigre*."

"That is an idea which can only be proved in action. If it does not work, you may lose San Cristóbal; and *El Tigre* may claw your face, as Eulogio's. If you lose San Cristóbal, little son-in-law, it would be better for you to be clawed by *El Tigre* than to come again within the reach of my hand. Because I respect you, I address you plainly.'

Ortiz bowed, fixing his jetty stare on *El Presidente's* heavy, and heavily ringed, hand:

"Your plain speaking is a needless condescension, Excellency. For I understand you at least as profoundly as you respect me."

His Excellency considered this reply which might, or might not, be taken as a compliment; looking searchingly at his son-in-law's bent head the while. The generous mop of stiff Indian hair told him

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nothing. He thumped the table hard, in a sudden burst of irritation.

"*Caramba!* Do you forever stare at saltcellars and olive dishes and backs of hands?" he shouted. "Do you never look a man in the eyes?"

The jetty round marbles rolled their vacant glance over *El Presidente*, for an instant, before slowly dropping to fix it upon the butter.

"Only when it is necessary to examine, in the eyes, something which I have not learned by the tone of the voice. That happens seldom to a thoughtful man," was Don Plutarco's answer, coolly spoken.

"Well, well. I make no criticism." His Excellency rose. "If your plan about *El Tigre* succeeds, I will make you governor of this province in the place of my cousin Eulogio, whom he killed."

"I would expect it; knowing your generosity, *Excelentissimo*."

"You are a man of sensible ambitions; therefore you would rather wear a governor's uniform than a coffin. So I need not say 'don't fail'! *Hasta la vista*, son-in-law."

"Till we meet again," Don Plutarco echoed. Whereupon the Illustrious Defender had set off for the river where his boat was moored; and, after luring Señor Lopez to death in the stream, had fled on seaward, toward Amarilla.

It was not quite true that Colonel Ortiz was unalarmed by the tales of the Man-Jaguar, even though he had once seen pictures of Pan and of satyrs in some book of ancient history. Don Plutarco was afraid of *El Tigre*; but he was a brave man, and he would not let his fears rule him. His

first task was to achieve a meeting with this supernatural creature, who was an unknown man by day and a tiger by night. He believed this could be done through his Indians; because, in times of peace, they traded with the Indians who were now said to be followers of *El Tigre*. That was one way. He dispatched several groups of two Indians and a soldier, to scout through the woods until they should come on *El Tigre's* Indians. Another way was to lure the Jaguar with food. To this end he sent men into the woods under his nephew, Lieutenant Adolfo, with a pig. They were to hang up the pig by its hind legs, to insure much and loud squealing; and to await, in the trees above, the possible coming of the Tiger Who Walks Alone. From comparative safety on high, Adolfo could then converse with the dread beast and arrange for a friendly parley with Colonel Ortiz within the walls of San Cristóbal. Don Plutarco was willing to risk his life, and his nephew's, to keep the family dynasty on the throne of Amarilla.

So it was that General Mendez, prowling in advance of his army in the vicinity of San Cristóbal, accompanied by Dick Wynn, the inevitable Brothers Perez, and half a dozen Indians, heard the frenzied shrieks of swine from the depths of the forest.

"A tiger has robbed some pig-pen," he said. "He is carrying off a live pig. We listen now, and hear which way he is going; so that we can avoid him."

They waited and listened for several minutes.

"*Capitán*, the squealing is all in one place," said Little Perez.

"*Capitán*," said José, "if a tiger had that pig he

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would either be running with him, in which case the squeals would also run; or he would be eating him, in which case there would be no squeals, they also being eaten."

"What do you think about it, Juan?" Mendez asked.

"*Capitán*, my brothers, being intelligent, have said wise things. Therefore I say nothing. Instead, I will go and discover the meaning of these squeals that continue to squeal all in one place. *Capitán*, I am a man like that!"

"*You are?*" Mendez exclaimed. He appeared wonderstruck.

"Assuredly, *capitán*. And even more than that. A tree of a man!"

Mendez chuckled.

"Then go. But see that no harm comes to the twins nestling under your shirt." His white teeth gleamed as he made this allusion to Pio and Concepción hidden under Juan's poncho. "And look out for tigers. They also will be coming to investigate that juicy fat noise."

"I will follow after you closely," Little Perez said to his brother, "for many reasons; but also because I am the best tiger-killer in Montalba, having killed already nineteen, without a scratch. Because José is the best man in Montalba with horses, he will stay here; so that, in case we do not return, our *capitán* will nevertheless be able to go on with the revolution, having still one Perez."

The two brothers melted silently into the darkness.

"We have to keep our eyes peeled, too," Mendez said. "Those squeals will make every tiger within

hearing come sliding through the brush. We don't want to be eaten yet. Man or pig is all the same to *el tigre* if his appetite is working."

They remained very still in their places, watching and listening.

Dick could not guess how much time had passed when Juan and Little Perez suddenly rose up, apparently out of the ground, beside him where he lay by Mendez. They had a fantastic story to tell. According to Juan, who did most of the talking, they had approached "the place of the squeals" from one side just as a jaguar had crept down on it from the other. Seeing the tiger, they had stopped, and Little Perez had got his lance ready. Though it was dark in the woods, enough moonlight filtered through at that spot for them to see that the squealing pig was suspended from the strong branch of a great tree. That was very suspicious.

"A pig does not climb a tree and hang there by his heels, of his own nature, *capitán*," said Juan; "above all, at night. So, being intelligent, I considered."

While he was considering, he heard, to his amazement, men's voices speaking in low tones from among the branches! What happened immediately afterward was incredible, and therefore could not be believed, but was nevertheless true.

"You know, *capitán*, that Juan Perez does not lie to his *capitán* about curious and important things. Of our *capitán* it is said, throughout Montalba, that his honor shines like the sky and his words are always truth. I, Juan Perez, am not a man like that, *capitán*; for to be as honest as my *capitán* would be

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an impertinence in a humble man. I show more respect. Yet, of such matters as pigs and men in trees, I speak no lies."

One man in the tree had talked to the tiger. He was, so he said, Lieutenant Adolfo, nephew of Colonel Ortiz, and he wished the tiger to come to San Cristóbal to see his uncle; but he would prefer that the tiger should come there as a man!

"And more words, *capitán*; showing plainly that the Adolfo in the tree thought the tiger was our *capitán*! It was dangerous to laugh. Otherwise, we would. The tiger wished ardently for the pig, but the talking annoyed him. He snarled and hesitated to leap. At last, he jumped; but the men pulled up the pig out of reach. They were now convinced he was not *El Tigre*. Then we slipped away to tell this news. But the tiger came also the way we went. He was very angry. And, smelling us, he came quickly and rose up to spring; but Little Perez ran the lance through him and afterward took his skin, thinking our *capitán* might need a new skin some day. And it is impossible to kill tigers when our *capitán* is present, because our *capitán* always desires the tigers to live. It is natural that a man should feel thus about his own relations."

The men in the tree were still hoping for a visit from *El Tigre*, because the pig was still squealing.

"Ralph, it sounds wild!" Dick said in English.

"No, no. Ortiz is only a Perez in gold braid, less intelligent; and more pompous, because of his father-in-law. What I see is a mad chance to take the town without shedding the blood of old friends and

neighbors." He was silent for a few moments. Then he spoke rapidly in Spanish to Juan. Their dialogue was in low whispers, and Dick could not hear what was said. Presently Mendez said to him:

"Juan will put on the jaguar skin and go back to the Adolfo and the squeals. Perhaps it is only a trap, and they will kill him. But if they do wish to take him to parley with Ortiz—and this is quite possible—he will agree to go, but not alone. They must permit him to take his brothers; that is, Little Perez and myself."

"And me," said Dick calmly. Mendez attempted to veto this notion, detailing all the chances against the scheme; including the more than probable one that Ortiz would have the presumed *Tigre* shot as soon as he had him inside the fort.

"Don't you think it's poor policy to talk so much here? Ortiz, most likely, has spies roaming round. They might hear us and shoot. If you go, I'm going," was Dick's reply. He heard a smothered chuckle, and felt Mendez's hand an instant on his shoulder.

"All right. The new *Tigre* has three brothers. José goes back to tell Gonsalvo, and with orders for him. Since you will go, come on. If we live, we will have some fun to-night at the theater; watching Juan Perez play Hamlet, with Concepción as Ophelia and Pio as Polonius!"

He turned to Juan and said:

"If all goes well and this is genuine, Ortiz will ask you questions. He may ask something you do not understand, since," he hastily added, "he is less intelligent than you. To such questions you should

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reply, 'Is it possible?' or 'That is a mystery'; or 'Speak more plainly,' if it is necessary to understand. I will be where you can see me and, when I do this," scratching his cheek slowly, "you will tell him to speak more plainly." He went on, arranging a system of signs to guide Juan, provided that Ortiz had asked for the interview in good faith.

CHAPTER XVII

A TREE OF A MAN

THEY followed Juan toward the "place of the squeals"; and waited a little way off. Juan, now wrapped in the skin of the beast killed by his brother, began to snarl and bark in excellent imitation of a jaguar. Then he spoke a few words in Spanish:

"I hear pig. I am hungry." More snarls followed.

Mendez, Dick, and Little Perez crept closer. If this were a trap, they meant to save Juan from death if possible. But it was no trap. They heard the trembling tones of Adolfo from the tree: and Juan's harsh answers. With instinctive cunning, Juan did not let himself be persuaded too easily. He made snarling leaps at the branch where Adolfo sat shaking. At the first of these, Adolfo's clammy hands dropped the pig, which made off, squealing, through the woods. At last, however, the false *Tigre* came to terms, on condition that his brothers should accompany him. When Mendez realized that the plot, so far, was going well, he doffed his own tiger skin, folded it, and strapped it under his poncho. Juan shouted; and the three men joined him.

As they passed into San Cristóbal, under the street lamps, Mendez pulled his sombrero down over his

face and hunched deeper into his poncho. In spite of the black beard, which had grown thickly during the past months, and his uncut hair, he ran the risk of being recognized in this town where he had been well known in other years. But risks were almost as common in Mendez's daily life as eggs on a family breakfast table. His only concern was for the boy. He knew that he should have insisted on Dick's returning with José to Gonsalvo. Yet the man's love of danger, and his own courage, were so great, that he admired Dick's cool way of taking hazards too much to stop him. His philosophy was summed up in something he had said to Dick several times:

"A man of honor and courage has to watch out only for dangerous things from the outside. A brave man in peril is safer than a coward in a shelter. Because the coward has always his mean soul with him. He carries the traitor in his own breast."

So, while he felt concern for Dick Wynn, he could not wish the boy elsewhere. The four of them would come through safely, or all would perish; and a brave death was nothing to shrink from.

Colonel Ortiz, as has been said, was no coward. Fearing the supernatural *Tigre*, at whose name even the Illustrious Defender trembled, and fully realizing how much more than his life he staked in bringing the dread creature within the town, he had, nevertheless, decided to hold his parley with *El Tigre* in his own house, rather than in the fort and surrounded by the garrison. Just such a show of amity as this might gain for him all he desired.

Don Plutarco, hearing a phrase said through chattering teeth, removed his jetty stare from the

table and let it rest briefly on the ghastly countenance of his nephew in the doorway.

"*El Tigre* is here," said Adolfo. "He came to the tree for the pig. He was the largest and fiercest tiger ever seen. Yet I talked bravely from the tree; even while he snarled and leaped. And presently he made the terms; and came. But he is still much enraged because the pig ran away. But the greatest mystery is that he was a tiger by the tree; but, when we had come out of the woods, he was a man; with brothers also," he added. This was quite true. Instructed by Mendez to drop his pelt in the forest, Juan had done so. Little Perez had picked it up and now carried it under his poncho. Mendez knew that, in a lighted room, the fact that the pelt was only fastened on the back of an ordinary man would be readily detected.

Colonel Ortiz, pondering, heard a long hoarse snarl, which was shortly followed by curses shrieked in crescendo by a different voice. Adolfo, wetting his fevered lips, was catapulted aside; and Ortiz saw Juan Perez, *El Tigre* for a night, striding in rudely with a whimpering marmoset on his hat and a screaming parrot on his shoulder. Both creatures had smelled the skin of the newly killed beast hanging over the poncho under which they nestled. The conservative Concepción was enraged beyond measure. All her feathers stood on end as she stated her mind, now that she was again on her open perch. Pio, terrified, had ascended the crown of Juan's hat and clung desperately to its peak. Don Plutarco's slow brain temporarily ceased to function. He sat silent and motionless, the unwink-

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ing glass of his stare fixed upon a sight such as neither Montalban scene, nor Greek picture book, had yielded to his gaze before.

"They are his brothers," muttered the trembling Adolfo.

"A tiger, a monkey, and a parrot born of the same parents?" Don Plutarco fumbled for a clear thought on the subject in vain. "It is not usual," he concluded.

"No, uncle. The three men are his brothers."

Juan, who was immensely delighted at the sensation he was making, strutted to the table, sat himself down in the chair recently occupied by his Excellency, and shouted for food.

Otiz sent Adolfo to the kitchen with orders for a repast; to begin at once with the remaining half-potful of the dictator's *sancoche*. The "brothers" squatted on the floor, somewhat apart from one another, and in strategic positions with regard to the doors. Mendez's quick ears told him that men, probably gendarmes, had entered the house and were invisibly on guard. He telegraphed this warning to Juan by rubbing his finger along his left shoe.

"Why are your men with guns in the hall?" Juan demanded fiercely. "If there is treachery, you will die of a scratched face like the man in Tuctu. Señor, I am a man like that!"

"How did you know?" Ortiz was taken aback.

"Ah! I know everything! For what else am I *El Tigre*?"

"There is no treachery. I only protect myself," Ortiz explained. He drew back into his chair with a sharp jerk, just in time, as Concepción, walking

along the table to the sugar bowl, made a vicious lunge at his nose with her open beak in passing. She discovered nuts, presently; and called, "Pio, Pio, Pio," in her most affectionate tones. Hesitatingly, Pio swung off the hat and went to her call. Don Plutarco stared at them, as if hypnotized. The spell was broken by the return of Adolfo, who told in timid whispers of terrified servants who refused to enter the room to serve the Man-Jaguar.

"Serve me yourself, then; and be quick about it, too!" Juan thundered. "Or shall I eat human meat?" pointing a finger at Ortiz. "Bring plates of *sancoche* also for my brothers. And see to it the chicken does not escape out of the stew! With your stupidity, you have already lost me a pig!" He banged his fist on the table, as he yelled, "Hurry! Do not give me the trouble of picking your bones!" The lieutenant fled, to reappear with the food, which was welcome indeed to men who had fasted for fifteen hours or more. Dick grunted audibly with satisfaction, as he fell to on the chicken, rice, savory red beans, and plantains. He hoped some of his hungry comrades in the woods had caught the squealing pig, although one pig would be small pickings among so many.

Ignoring the array of spoons and forks on the table, Juan Perez ate with his fingers, noisily and heartily, while Colonel Ortiz talked to him of Mendez.

"It is said that *El Tigre* and Mendez are friends," said Ortiz: "but the Illustrious Defender is a better friend for *El Tigre* than this Mendez, who has no standing among men of substance."

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"Is it possible? *Is it possible?*" Juan answered, seeing Mendez's gesture out of the corner of his eye.

"It is said also that you know where Mendez is now hidden."

"It is a mystery," Juan replied, still being guided by signs. This answer was not satisfying to Juan's sense of humor, which was that of the practical joker. So he added, "Ah ha!" with a loud snarl, "I can smell his food behind his beard! For what else am I *El Tigre*?" Dick pretended to choke on a bone. He had almost laughed aloud.

"Before I say more," Ortiz continued, "*El Presidente* desires me to ask you one question."

"Well, speak plainly!" Juan interrupted. Mendez had slowly scratched his cheek to warn Juan, in advance, not to attempt an answer to the question if he did not thoroughly understand it. While Don Plutarco, to whom speech came slowly, prepared to word his question, Juan scooped up three bananas from the fruit dish. He stripped one, tossed the rind nonchalantly on the velvet carpet, and crammed the banana down his throat in one mouthful; then proceeded to deal likewise with the second. It was thus, with hands helpless and mouth stopped, that he heard Ortiz say:

"*El Presidente* desires me to inquire why you make revolution? It is of importance that this be answered."

Juan's eyes registered, at first, the blankly questioning look of one who is not sure that he has heard correctly. Then they opened in a surprise that turned to a glittering and incredulous angry con-

tempt. The third banana's peeled yellow-white substance spurted, as his finger muscles automatically crushed it to an oozy pulp. He choked on the other, as he tried to explain. He freed his impeded utterance by assisting the mass down his throat with his finger. He forgot all about looking to Mendez for signs.

"Where is this fool of a president?" he yelled, when he could speak. "Let me pull his nose! He wishes to insult me! He brings me here to ask a question like that? If I asked my horse, he would kick me off his back!" He banged both fists on the table and glared into Don Plutarco's face. "Have you the brains of a hen? Of a pig? Of two black-eyed peas? You who stare at me like the black spots on two peas! For what does *any patriot* make revolution? *For liberty and much loot!* It is a shame that a man so ignorant should be a president of my country!"

In the agonized struggle with an almost overpowering laughter, Dick lost the next few sentences. Knowing how easily Mendez burst out laughing, Dick marveled at his self-control now. Little Perez, of course, saw nothing funny in Juan's performance. He shared his brother's views. Surely even the crocodiles knew why sensible patriots made revolutions.

Ortiz went on to offer "much loot" in the name of the government for the betrayal of Mendez, "the false friend who has insulted *El Tigre* by wearing his coat and name and deceiving many, and is therefore worthy of *El Tigre's* revenge."

Seeing Mendez had signaled "yes" to this, Juan

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leaped to his feet. He strode up and down the room in an excess of fury.

"Pretends to be me—*me*—the great *Tigre*? Do you hear that, brother?" He kicked Mendez's foot in passing. "Oh, what a villain! Traitor! I feel the tiger hairs beginning to sprout on my backbone! My toe nails are growing! It is always so when I am insulted. Señor, you are a true friend to inform me of this thing. Sit there, and," with a terrible look, "do not listen. Put your ears in your shoes, while I confer with my brothers." He squatted beside Mendez, and they whispered together. Then, to avoid rousing suspicion, he whispered also in the ears of Little Perez and Dick.

"Come now," he thundered, pointing his grubby and commanding finger at Ortiz. "You and I and this brother," indicating Little Perez, "will go to seize Mendez. These two brothers desire to sleep. They will remain till we return. Brothers, look well over the house, and take only the best beds! If there is a phonograph, play it to amuse yourselves. Come on!"

Ortiz, well content at the result of his daring plan, went out with Juan and Little Perez. It was evident that *El Tigre* was completely won over; or surely he would not have left two of his brothers behind.

"And now what?" Dick whispered in English.

"Little Perez will ride on ahead of them and send word, by my Indian scouts, to Felipe, who will come on with some of the men—pretending to be Mendez. Ortiz will see this Mendez and his com-

panions apparently fall completely under the supernatural spell of the Man-Jaguar, and drop their rifles and follow him and Ortiz back to the town like sheep. The rest of my men, coming after them secretly, will pick up the dropped rifles and wait within earshot for our signal. This business must be over before dawn. It needs the dark. As to the rest, all I require is a few moments, unperceived and uninterrupted, at our good Ortiz's telephone."

While Dick watched him, wondering what he meant, Mendez started the phonograph going at a lively pace with a loud orchestral record.

"Keep watch at the door so that no one listens," he said. "Better stand just outside and talk to any gendarmes or servants. Talk loudly." As the door closed behind Dick, Mendez took down the receiver and called a number. The conversation was brief and seemed to relate to the price of coffee. Presently, he called Dick in. His eyes were sparkling.

"I told you I had friends here? Huh? But I did not tell you that one of them has secretly organized the League of Youth; all the young men of this province who are true patriots! Some came with us from Tuctu. In San Cristóbal are sixty more, who will be here, mounted and armed, as quickly as the one I telephoned to can gather them together. When Ortiz returns bringing the rest of my men, I and the Youths will already own the town. Ah ha!" he laughed softly. "It will take them at least three-quarters of an hour. So, for that time, we might as well sleep! Where are the best beds?" He

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grinned, and led off in search of the colonel's bed-chamber. There was no danger of disturbing the lady of the house, for Ortiz had sent her to a relative's hacienda for safekeeping.

The noise of hoofs woke Dick. Mendez was already up. They went downstairs and into the street. Lieutenant Adolfo was arguing with a courteous young man on horseback, who seemed to be the spokesman for a group that kept on increasing with the arrival of other riders.

"Yes, lieutenant," said the young man, "it is truly against orders to congregate thus in the streets. But this is a special matter. The rumor that our brilliant friend, Colonel Ortiz, has captured *El Tigre* has gone like wildfire through the town. It is impossible that we should not come to congratulate him; and, also, to see this curious monster."

Adolfo was not a firm man, and the colloquy continued. Dick was pointed out as a brother of *El Tigre*. The other brother had disappeared.

Fifteen minutes later Colonel Ortiz arrived with Juan and Gonsalvo and a small company of *llaneros* and Indians. The latter carried their bows; but the other men were unarmed. As Don Plutarco began to make a short speech, explaining what had happened, the members of the League of Youth clustered about him. By skilful shoving and scattering they managed to occupy places beside every gendarme, for the garrison also had poured into the square.

"Which is *El Tigre*?" some one called.

"This is he!" Ortiz answered.

"No! I am he!" Mendez shouted, and spurred

into the thick of the group. He had donned his tiger skin in the dark, and had slipped round and mounted his horse, which José Perez was leading. While Ortiz stared, stupefied, he was respectfully, but firmly seized by two of the Youths. As swiftly, every member of the garrison was grasped by the arms and deprived of his weapons.

"Colonel, do not order your Indians to shoot," Mendez cried, knowing that Ortiz was courageous enough for that. "They have only plain arrows. The arrows of my Indians are poisoned. The least scratch is death." He drew near to him. "I have to order you to be confined in the prison. I regret this. I would gladly let so brave a man keep both his sword and his liberty. But the freedom of my country comes first; and you are a danger to it."

Ortiz, a powerful man, wrenched his hand free and snatched back the fur flap from Mendez's face.

"You—you—the brother—" he stammered. "No. You are no brother to this little man."

Mendez caught Ortiz's hand and gripped it. His eyes glowed. He loved a fearless man.

"I am Mendez," he said. "And I am proud to call you my countryman."

"I like that man," he said to Dick as Ortiz was led away. "When I have got rid of his father-in-law, I will make friends with him. He is brave. If he had not been so brave, willing to take a chance, I could not have captured San Cristóbal without spilling one drop of blood. Now, you go to bed. I must stay up and consult with my friends. And the magnificent Juan and his brothers, who never tire while there is something to do, must take other men and

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go for the guns. To-morrow night, or to-night, rather, for the dawn comes now, we start for Amarilla. We will not enter there without firing a shot. Not without firing many."

CHAPTER XVIII

DICK SEES THE END

THE shots began to crack before the next dawn came in from the sea. Detachments of his Excellency's guerrillas opened fire, from the wooded heights, on the mules and motor trucks which carried the guns. It was pitch dark down in the road; and the guerrillas were aiming by sound instead of by sight.

"Let them alone," said Mendez. "They have ammunition to waste. But we haven't."

A mule fell, shot through the head in front of a lorry. Dick leaped off his horse to help Little Perez and José remove the dead beast's pack and drag it aside. Shots spat upon the hard soil around them.

"All right. Go on," he cried to the driver. The lorry did not move. Dick ran round to tell the man, thinking that the noise of the shooting had drowned his words. He found him fallen over the wheel, dead. This driver had been one of the younger members of the League of Youth. Dick had judged him to be about two years older than himself. There seemed to be only one way to keep moving. Dick ran back to Little Perez.

"Take care of my horse," he said. "I have to drive that car."

Silently thanking his father for having taught him

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a lot about handling cars, Dick sprang to the seat. The thing to do, under the circumstances, was to cast the dead boy's body out by the roadside. But Dick thought of the vultures, swooping in great circles under the illimitable tropic sky and then dropping like black stones, as he had seen them from the parapet at Tuctu. And he thought of the flashing eyes of this youth, a few hours before, when they had talked together just before the start from San Cristóbal. "*Por la libertad!*" How keen he had been to enter Amarilla with Mendez; yet how willing to die, if die he must, in this effort to wipe out the shame that lay upon his country!

Dick pulled the slight body off the wheel and let it down gently in a heap, where it could not interfere with his own necessary movements.

"This thing meant more to you than it can mean to me," Dick muttered. "Because this is your country. If I get to Amarilla, so shall you!"

For the first time, because of the passing of one who was, perhaps, the youngest member of the League of Youth, Dick Wynn realized that the march of Mendez, with his motley army of outlaws, Indians, and gentlemen, was not just a thrilling and amazing adventure through a picture-book land of marvels; but a passion, a sacrifice, and an ideal, in motion—a people moving, even as their column was moving now, through dark and dangerous hours toward a light.

After morning broke, the guerrillas no longer had it all their own way. The answering fusillades from the road put them to flight; or, perhaps, it was the sight of a huge jaguar on a spotted horse, riding

immune amid a hail of bullets. The last volley from the hill emptied several saddles on Dick's right, and spattered over the lorry. Arrows were swishing, too, indicating that some of the dictator's red allies were on hand here also. Dick cried out as he saw Juan pitch from the saddle and swing from one stirrup, with the tall shaft of an arrow rising from his thigh. In another moment Mendez had dashed up and caught him in his arms. He laid him on the ground in the shelter of the motor, which Dick had brought to a halt.

"My little Juan! You are not hurt?"

With a look of profound pride Juan answered him, pointing to the shaft:

"*Capitán, se murio un palo de hombre!*"

"What! You say 'A tree of a man dies'?" Mendez repeated Juan's words. "Nonsense! What are you talking about? You think that arrow is poisoned? Huh? No! They have no *curare*."

"No *curare*?" Juan queried. "Then it is nothing but three inches of steel sticking in my hip bone! Pull it out, *capitán*; for you are one of the strongest men in Montalba."

Mendez was forced to use all his truly remarkable strength to loosen the long steel barb embedded in the bone. Dick gritted his teeth and winced, in sympathy for the brave little man who, he knew, must be suffering torture while Mendez struggled with the *lancera*. But Juan made no outcry. When he opened his lips, once, it was to say, somewhat weakly and huskily:

"I would like to pull both their noses."

"Whose noses?" asked Little Perez, who was

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slashing his own undershirt to make a bandage. Juan grasped Mendez's extended hand and rose to his feet. He leaned against the lorry, while his brother bound his thigh.

"Whose noses?" he repeated. "Why, that fool of a president's, who inquires of me why patriots make revolution! And the nose of that fool of a president's Indian, who thinks he can kill me by an arrow without *curare*! Me! Juan Perez! *un palo de hombre*!" He limped to his horse and, assisted by Little Perez, clambered into the saddle. "What a strange thing is life, *capitán*! That I, a wise man, should be made lame, perhaps for life, by a fool! However, that is of no importance; because I am a *llanero*. I do not walk. I ride. My horse will not know whether I am lame or not." He trotted off.

"You are all right?" Mendez asked Dick.

"Yes. Golly! Juan is magnificent. Say, what did he do with his pets?"

"Oh, he found another old woman to take care of them in San Cristóbal. He said that Pio was getting bilious from want of sleep." Mendez chuckled, and rode on.

His first objective was the hill, which directly overlooked the fortress and the dictator's prisonlike mansion. Here *El Presidente* had ordered the major part of his army to concentrate. The remainder of his forces were in the streets of the town; and on the meadow, from which his airplanes were accustomed to take off. The warship, far down the harbor, was under steam. Soldiers guarded the landing place for the planes on the opposite shore; and the royal launch was moored just

below, in readiness if the revolutionists should overcome the troops on the hill and force entrance into the city. Unseen of all, *El Presidente* watched the conflict on the hill from a barred window in his stone castle. His daughter, Juana, stood at his elbow, with pallid face and silently moving lips.

"Ortiz failed. The fool!" his Excellency muttered. "If I could know that Little Son-in-law lay under his own table, with a scratched face, I would be pleased. What is it now?" he demanded harshly, as a gendarme entered.

"*Excelentissimo*," the man saluted. "One of the planes is out of commission. Lieutenant Moreno's plane. He has no idea how it happened. *Excelentissimo*," nervously, seeing the gray mist of rage spreading over the dictator's countenance, "Moreno remarks that such things occur of themselves where there are rumors of—*El Tigre*." He whispered the name.

"Fool!" his Excellency roared. "No *Tigre* is there. I have watched for three hours through the glasses, and these are the best lenses yet made. And I have seen no *Tigre*. But Mendez is there. Only Mendez; a man. Let Moreno be shot! No! Hang him!"

"*Excelentissimo*, the other aviator, Lieutenant Sepulveda, has been wounded by a bullet in the right arm. It is unlikely that he can fly his own machine, in case his Excellency should wish to visit the warship," he concluded tactfully.

"Then let Moreno live, to fly the good machine! I will have him shot at the landing place, instead. Watch the good plane; so that no mischief comes to

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it. But we do not fly yet! My army holds the hill. Go; and hearten my soldiers by telling them that their Illustrious Defender is still here to protect them."

"They do not see you, behind these thick stone walls; but, doubtless, to hear of you will comfort them, since the fire of the revolutionists' machine guns is very effective." The gendarme saluted and withdrew.

Dusk fell; and the watcher behind the stone walls could see nothing but spurts of flame. Gradually the darkness thinned above the crest of the range, as the moon poured glistening silver into the indigo night. In time, the hill became starkly bright. *El Presidente* could use his field glasses again, to advantage.

"What's this? Fools! Cowards! Traitors!" he gasped hoarsely. The silvered mound seemed to be spilling forth small black imps, which tumbled and bounced pellmell in wild retreat. Other dark shapes were rising over the top. For one instant, *El Presidente* looked through his glasses at a silvery, spotted horse with a spotted monster on its back. Then he threw the glasses from him, thrust the trembling Juana out of his way, and plunged, panting, down the stairs.

A little later, Dick Wynn, riding now at Mendez's side, saw an airplane soar into the white sky.

"See, Ralph!" he cried. They looked in silence while the plane circled on high.

"The Illustrious Defender does his fade-away." Mendez smiled cynically. "Well, I'm glad. I want no atrocities. How beautiful it looks! Like a giant condor in the moonlight! Hullo! What is the

matter there? He comes back over the field! Why is that?"

While they watched, wondering at the strange course of the aviator, the machine suddenly pitched earthward, from a great height, and crashed upon the field. For a time, they did not speak.

"Well, that is the end," Mendez said at last, gravely. "Come on. There is nothing more to do, but to enter Amarilla. Felipe is already galloping his men into the town."

Shouts of terror reached their ears from all sides, as they dashed forward.

"It is he! The Tiger Who Walks Alone!" The men, who had once been his Excellency's soldiers, threw away their weapons and fled along all the avenues of Amarilla.

Several days later, Dick, Uncle Horace, and Colonel Wynn were sitting in the patio of the hotel waiting for Mendez, who was due to drink coffee with them. In another corner, Don Felipe Gonsalvo lounged with an old friend, a rubber buyer from New York. Dick overheard a phrase or two, which made him grin.

"It is truly incredible that a man like myself, señor, utterly pacific in nature and, by temperament, more studious and scientific even than commercial, should have become involved in a revolution! If I, myself, cannot understand it, how can another?"

Dick kicked Uncle Horace's foot. Professor Wynn smiled contentedly and nodded.

Presently Mendez entered the patio from the hotel, looking rather embarrassed. He was dressed

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in an immaculate white suit, wore a rose in his buttonhole, and carried a huge basket of flowers.

"Dick Wynn," he said, chuckling, "you have to get me out of this situation. Everywhere I ride, I am pelted with flowers from open windows. But, just now, the old blind woman who sells flowers outside the hotel, hearing my name, insisted on giving me her whole basket. She did this for love. And, therefore, I cannot pay her. Here," he took money out of his pocket; "you go and buy flowers from the florist to fill another big basket, and give them to her, so that she can sell them; and put the change, also, in the basket. You don't mind? Huh?"

"Of course not!"

"Afterward, maybe you like to go with me to put these flowers on Moreno's grave?" His smile had given place to the iron look.

"Who is Moreno?" Dick asked wondering why the name of Moreno should affect Mendez so deeply.

"I forgot you didn't know. He is the aviator who crashed with *El Presidente*. How little we guessed, as we stood watching that plane! Read this note, addressed to me, which was in his pocket." He drew an envelope out of his wallet and handed it to Dick.

Dick read the brief lines aloud:

To His Excellency, General de Mendez. From beyond Death I salute the Liberator of my country. Alfonso de Moreno.

"Why, Ralph!" Dick said slowly, awed. "He—he—crashed on purpose!"

"Yes. He was a Montalban, of my people, and of my land." He shook off the dark shadow which had settled on his face, smiled, and said: "Fix up that old blind flower-vender for me. Huh?"

Having performed that duty, and also having started a number of people buying the old woman's flowers, Dick was about to return when he heard the gentle click of hoofs at a walk. He looked up, to see Juan Perez reining in beside him, with a genial smile of greeting on his face. Pio decked his hat. Concepción perched on his shoulder.

"To-day I fetch them from San Cristóbal," said Juan. "We are, all three, very happy. I love my Pio and my Concepción, Don Dick. Oh, yes! I am a man like that! Did you know that now I am a general? And Little Perez and José, also? Oh, yes! *El Tigre* made us all a general; because Brothers Perez said to him, 'it is a shame not to loot this town, which is so rich.' And he said, 'A general does not loot; you have not seen *El Tigre* loot. You cannot loot; because I now make you, all three, a general.' This is a great honor, Don Dick; although deserved."

"Yes," Dick agreed, gravely.

"Also, Brothers Perez do not fight any more. We go with your father to the mine. We shall get much loot there."

"You're going to loot my father's property?" Dick inquired, anxiously.

"But assuredly! The loot is measured by the day and is paid by the month; and it is called wages, because it is not taken in war. So says *El Tigre*. Brothers Perez do not have to kill any one to get it.

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On the contrary, it is given to us! But it is good loot; and, therefore, we do not care what it is called! We are now three Generals Perez; for liberty and much wages, *amigo!*"

He nodded, in friendly fashion, and prepared to ride on.

"*Hasta la vista*, General Juan," Dick called after him, smiling.

"Till we meet again, Don Dick."

Through the gold glory of the sunlight, made mellower still by the fragrance of roses permeating the air, Dick walked into the hotel and out to the cooler, scented atmosphere of the patio. He was glad that he would have to stay some months longer in Montalba, near Ralph. He had not only a friend, in this dark-faced man with the flashing tawny eyes, but a new hero. The Tiger Who Walks Alone would hold a firm place in Dick Wynn's heart all his life. The boy's blue eyes sparkled happily as he crossed the patio with brisk steps, and sank into a chair between his father and Mendez.

